A Whirl Asunder

Gertrude Atherton

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A WHIRL ASUNDER.

"WHY DID YOU BRING ME HERE? HE ASKED."—*Page 75.*

A Whirl Asunder

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"PATIENCE SPARHAWK," ETC.

Illustrated by

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CHAPTER I.

As the train stopped for the sixth time, Clive descended abruptly.

"I think I'll walk the rest of the way," he said to the conductor. "Just look after my portmanteau, will you? and see that it is left at Yorba with my boxes."

"O. K.," said the man. "But you must like walking."

Clive had spent seven days on the ocean, three in the furious energy of New York, and six on a transcontinental train, whose discomforts made him wonder if he had a moral right to enter the embarrassing state of matrimony with a temper hopelessly soured. As he had come to California to marry, and

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as his betrothed was at a hotel in the northern redwoods, he did not pause for rest in San Francisco. He left, two hours after his arrival, on a narrow gauge train, which dashed down precipitous mountain slopes; shot rocking from side to side, about curves on a road so narrow that the brush scraped the windows, or the eye looked down into the blackness of a cañon, five hundred feet below; raced shrieking across trestles which seemed to swing midway between heaven and earth; only to slacken, with protesting snort and jerk, when climbing to some dizzier height. Clive had stood for an hour on the platform, fascinated by the danger, and the bleak solemnity of the forests, whose rigid trunks, and short, stiffly pointed arms looked as if they had not quivered since time began. But he felt that he had had enough, moreover that he had not drawn an uncompanioned breath since he left England. If he was not possessed by the grace-

ful impatience of the lover, he reminded himself that he was tired and nervous, and had been obliged to go dirty for six days, enough to knock the romance out of any man; the ubiquitous human animal had talked incessantly for sixteen days, and his legs ached for want of stretching.

A twisted old man with a sharp eye, a rusty beard depending aimlessly from a thin tobacco-stained mouth, limped across the platform, rolling a flag. Clive asked him if he could get to the Yorba hotel on foot.

The man stared. "Well, you *be* an Englishman, *I* guess," he remarked.

"Yes, I am an Englishman," said Clive haughtily.

"Oh, no offence, but the way you English do walk, beats us. We ain't none too fond of walkin' in Californy. Too many mountains, I guess. Yes, you kin walk it, and I guess you'll have to. There goes your train. Stranger in these parts?"

"I arrived in California to-day."

"So. Goin' to raise cattle, or just seein' the wonders of the Gold State?"

"Will you kindly point out the way? And I should like to send a despatch to the hotel, if possible."

"Oh, suttenly. We don't think much of English manners in these parts, I don't mind sayin'. You English act as if you owned God Almighty when you come out here. You forget we licked ye twice. Come after a Californy heiress?"

Clive felt an impulse to throw the man over the trestle, then laughed.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "I am sorry my manners are bad, but the truth is, my head is tired and my legs are not. Come, show me the way."

Being further mollified by a silver dollar, the old man replied graciously, "All right, sir. Just amuse yourself while I send your telegram, and fetch a dark lantern. You'll

need it. The moon's doin' well, but the tops of them redwoods knit together, and are as close as a roof."

Clive walked idly about the little waiting-room. The walls were decorated with illustrated weekly newspapers, and the gratuitous lithograph. John L. Sullivan, looking, under the softening influence of the weekly artist, as if sculptured from mush, glowered across at Corbett, who displayed his muscles in a dandified attitude. There were also several lithographs of pretty, rather elegant-looking girls. Clive noticed that one had a rude frame of young redwood branches about it, and occupied the post of honor at the head of the room. He walked over and examined it as well as he could by the light of the smoking lamp.

The head was in profile, severe in outline, as classic as the modern head ever is. The chin was lifted proudly, the nostrils looked capable of expansion. The brow and eyes

suggested intellect, the lower part of the face pride and self-will and passion, perhaps undeveloped cruelty and sensuality.

"Who is Miss Belmont?" he asked, as the station agent left the telegraph table.

"Oh, she's one of the heiresses. That's our high-toned society paper. It's printin' a series of Californy heiresses. One of the other papers says as how it's a good guide book for impecoonious furriners, and I guess that's about the size of it. She's got a million, and nobody but an aunt, and she has her own way, I —tell—you. She'll be a handful to manage; but somehow, although she keeps people talkin', they don't believe as much harm of her as of some that's more quiet. You'll meet her, I guess, if you're goin' to stay at Yorba, for she's got a big house in the redwoods and knows a lot of the hotel folks and the Bohemian Club fellers. I like her. She rides this way once a year or so, and we have a good chin about

politics. She knows a thing or two, you bet, and she believes in Grover."

"How old is she? And why doesn't she marry?" asked Clive idly, as they walked up the road.

"She's twenty-six, and she's goin' to marry—a Noo York feller; one of them with Dutch names. She's had offers, *I* guess. Three of your lords, I know of. But lords don't stand much show with Californy girls—them as was raised here, anyhow. They don't give a damn for titles, and they scent a fortune-hunter before he's off the dock. They've put their heads together and talked him over before's he's registered. This Dutchman's got money, so I guess he's all right. Be you a lord?"

"I am not. I am a barrister, and the son of a barrister."

"What may that be?"

"I believe you call it lawyer out here."

"O—h—h—a lawyer's a gay bird, ain't

he? And don't he have a good time?" The old man chuckled.

"I never found them different from other men. What do you mean?"

"Ours are rippers. I've been in Californy since '49, and I could spin some yarns that would make your hair curl, young man. Lord, Lord, the old ones were tough. The young ones ain't quite so bad, but they're doing their best."

"California is rather a wild place, isn t it."

"It was. It's quietin' down now, and it ain't near so interestin'. Jack Belmont, that there young lady's father, was a lawyer when he fust come here, but he struck it rich in Con. Virginia, in '74, and after that warn't he a ripper. Oh, Lord! He *was* a terror. But he done his duty by his girl; had her eddicated in Paris and Noo York, and never let no one cross her. He was as fine lookin' a man as I ever seen, almost as

tall and clean made as you be, and awful open-handed and popular, although a terrible enemy. He's shot his man twice over, they say, and I believe it. His wife died ten years before him. She was fond of him, too, poor thing, and he made no bones about bein' unfaithful to her—they don't out here. A man's no good if you can't tell a yarn or two about him. Well, Jack Belmont died five years ago, and left about a million dollars to his girl. He'd had a long sight more, but she was lucky to git that. They say as how she was awful broke up when he died."

"You're a regular old *chronique scandaleuse*," said Clive, much interested. "What sort of a social position has this Miss Belmont? Is she received?"

"Received? Glory, man—why her father was a southern gent—Maryland, as I remember, and her mother was from Boston. They led society here in the sixties; they're

one of the old families of Californy. That's the reason Miss Belmont does as she damned pleases, and nobody dares say boo—that and the million. She's ancient aristocracy, she is. Received! Oh, Lord!"

Clive, much amused, asked: "What does she do that is so dreadful?"

"Oh, she's been engaged fifteen times; she rides about the country in boy's clothes, and sits up all night under the trees at Del Monte talkin' to a man, or gives all her dances to one man at a party, and then cuts him the next day on the street; and when she gits tired of people, comes up here without even her aunt. She used to run to fires, but she gave that up some years ago. She travels about the country for weeks without a chaperon, and once went camping alone with five men. Sometimes she'll fill her house up with men for a week, and not have no other woman, savin' her aunt. Lately she's more quiet, they say, and has

become a terrible reader. Last winter she stayed up here for three months alone. I hear as how people talked. But I didn't see nothin'. She's all right, or my name ain't Jo Bagly. Well, here you are, sir. Good luck to ye! Keep to the road and don't strike off on any of them side trails, and you can't go wrong. Evenin'."

Clive went into the dark forest. What the old man had told him of Miss Belmont had quickened his imagination, and he speculated about her for some moments; then his thoughts wandered to his English betrothed. He had not seen her for two years. Her mother's health failing, her father had taken his family to Southern California. A year later Mrs. Gordon had died and her husband having bought a ranch in which he was much interested, had written to Clive that he wanted his eldest daughter for another year; by that time her sister would have finished school, and could take

her place as head of the household. Lately he and Mary had felt the debilitating influence of the southern climate and had gone to the redwoods of the north. There Clive was to meet them, remain a few weeks, then marry in San Francisco and take his wife back to England.

Clive was thirty-four, ten years older than Mary Gordon. He recalled the day he had proposed to her. She had come down the steps of her father's house, in a blue gown and garden hat, and they had gone for a walk in the woods. She was not a clever woman, and she had only the white and pink and brown, the rounded lines of youth, no positive beauty of face or figure; but with the blind instinct of his race he had turned almost automatically to the type of woman who, time out of mind, has produced the strong-limbed, strong-brained men that have made a nation insolently great. She reminded him of his mother, with her even sweetness

of nature, her sympathy, her large maternal suggestion. He had known her since her early girlhood and grown fonder of her each year. She rested him, and had the divine feminine faculty of making him feel a better and cleverer man than he was in the habit of thinking himself elsewhere.

She had accepted him with the sweetest smile he had ever seen, and he had wondered if other men were as fortunate. For two years he saw much of her, then she went to America, and he had plunged into his work and his man's life, not missing her as consistently as he had expected, but caring for her none the less. The Saturday mail brought him, unintermittingly, a letter eight pages long, neatly written, and describing in detail the daily life of her family, and of the strange people about them. They were calm, affectionate, interesting letters, which Clive enjoyed and to which he replied with a hurried scrawl, rarely covering more

than one page. An Englishwoman does not expect much, but Mary occasionally hinted sadly that a longer letter would make her happier; whereupon his conscience hurt him and he wrote her two pages.

He enjoyed these two years, despite hard work; he was popular with men and women, and much was popular with him that adds to the keener pleasures of life. When the time came to pack his boxes and go to America, he puffed a large regretful rack from his last pipe of freedom; but it did not occur to him to ask release. For the matter of that, although he had come to regard Mary Gordon as the inevitable rather than the desired, he had felt for her the strong tenderness which such men feel for such women, which endures, and never in any circumstances turns to hate.

After a time Clive extinguished the lantern: it illumined the road fitfully, but accentuated the dense blackness of the forest.

The undergrowth was too thick to permit him to stray aside, and he wanted to form some idea of his surroundings. His eyes ascustomed themselves to the dark. Moon rays splashed or trickled here and there through lofty cleft and mesh. Clive paused once and looked up. The straight trees, sometimes slender, sometimes huge, were as inflexible as granite, an unbroken column for a hundred feet or more; then thrusting out rigid arms from a tapering trunk into another hundred feet of space. The effect was that of a dense forest suspended in air, supported above the low brush forest on a vast irregular colonnade, out of whose ruins it might have sprung. Clive had never known a stillness so profound, a repose so absolute. But it was not the peaceful repose of an English wood. It suggested the heavy brooding stillness of archaic days, when the uneasy world drowsed before another convulsion. There was some other

influence abroad in the woods, but at the time its meaning eluded him.

Suddenly it occurred to him that he could not see Mary Gordon in this forest. There was an irritating incongruity in the very thought. She belonged to the sweet calm beech woods, of England; nothing in her was in consonance with the storm and stress, the passion and fatality which this strange country suggested. Did the women of California fit their frame? He experienced a strong desire for the companionship of a woman who would interpret this forest to him, then called himself an ass and strode on.

An hour later he became aware of a distant and deep murmur. It was crossed suddenly by a wild, hilarious yell. Clive relit the lantern and flashed it along the brush at his right. Presently he came upon a narrow trail. The prospect of adventure after sixteen days of civilized monotony

lured him aside, and he walked rapidly down the bypath. In a few moments he found himself on the edge of a large clearing. The moon poured in without let and revealed a scene of singular and uncomfortable suggestion.

In the middle of the space was a huge funeral pyre; beyond it, evidently on a bier, Clive could see the stony, upturned feet of a mammoth corpse, lightly covered with a white pall. Between the pyre and the trees nearer him, a large caldron swung over a heap of fagots, which were beginning to crackle gently. The place looked as if about to be the scene of some awful rite. Englishmen are willing to believe anything about California, and Clive, who had commanded the admiration of his father's colleagues with his clear, quick, logical brain, leaped at once to the conclusion that this part of California was still the hunting-ground of the Red Indian, and that some

mighty chief was about to be cremated; whilst his widow, perchance, sacrificed herself in the caldron.

He plunged his hands into his pockets and awaited developments with the nervous delight of a schoolboy. Although the forest was silent again, he had an uneasy sense of many human beings at no great distance.

He had not long to wait. There was a sudden red glare which made the aisles of the forest seem alive with dancing shapes, hideously contorted. Simultaneously there arose a low soft chanting, monotonous and musical, bizarre rather than weird. Then out of the recesses on the far side of the clearing, startlingly defined under the blaze of many torches held aloft in the background, emerged a high priest, his crown shaven, his beard flowing to his waist, his white robes marking the austerity of his order. His hands were folded on his breast, his head bowed. Behind him, two and two, followed

twenty acolytes, swinging censers, the heavy perfume of the incense rising to the pungent odor of the redwoods, blending harmoniously: the lofty forest aisles were become those of some vast primeval crypt.

Then illusion was in a measure dispelled. The two hundred torchbearers who came after wore the ordinary outing clothes of civilization.

The strange procession marched slowly round the circle, passing perilously close to Clive. Then the priest and acolytes walked solemnly up to the caldron, the others dispersing themselves irregularly, leaping occasionally and waving their torches. The fagots were blazing; Clive fancied he heard a merry bubbling. A moment of profound silence. Then the priest dropped something into the caldron, chanting an invocation of which Clive could make nothing, although he was a scholar in several languages. The acolytes and torchbearers

tossed to the priest entities and imaginations, which he dropped with much ceremony into the caldron, to the accompaniment of hollow, not to say ribald laughter, and jests which had a strong flavor of personalities.

The prologue lasted ten minutes. Then the mummers crowded backward and faced the pyre. Again the heavy silence fell. The priest went forward, and raising his clasped hands and set face to the moon, stood, for a moment, like a statue on a monument, then turned slowly and beckoned. The acolytes formed in line and marched with solemn precision to the other side of the pyre. A moment later they reappeared, walking with halting steps, their heads bowed, chanting dismally. On their shoulders they carried a long bier, on which, apparently, lay the corpse of a dead giant. The priest sprinkled the body, then turned away with a gesture of loathing. The acolytes carried it by the torchbearers, who

"THERE WAS THE HISS OF TAR, THE LEAP OF ONE GREAT FLAME."—*Page 23.*

spat upon and execrated it ; then slowly and laboriously mounted the pyre, and dropping the bier on its apex, scampered indecorously down with savage grunts of satisfaction, their white garments fluttering along the dark pile like a wash on a windy day. The corpse lay long and white and horrid under the beating moon and the flare of torch. As the acolytes reached the ground the rest of the company rushed simultaneously forward, and with a hideous yell flung their torches at the pyre. There was the hiss of tar, the leap of one great flame, an angry crackling. A moment more and the forest would be more vividly alight than it had ever been at noonday. Clive, feeling as uncomfortable as an eavesdropper, but too fascinated to retreat, stepped behind a large redwood. With his eyes still fixed on the strange scene he did not pick his steps, and coming suddenly in contact with a pliable body, he nearly knocked it over. There

was a smothered shriek, followed by a suppressed but forcible vocative. Clive mechanically lifted his hat.

"I beg your pardon," he said, addressing a tall lad, whose face was partly concealed by the visor of a cap; "I hope I have not hurt you."

"I am not so easily hurt," said the lad haughtily.

The masculine man never lived who did not recognize a feminine woman in whatever guise, if within the radius of her magnetism. This young masquerader interested Clive at once. Her voice had a warm huskiness. The mouth and chin were classically cut, but very human. She had thrown back her head and revealed a round beautiful throat. The loose flannel shirt and jacket concealed her figure, but even the slight motions she had made revealed energy and grace.

Clive offered her a cigarette. She accepted it and smoked daintily, withdrawing as much

as possible into the shadow and shielding her face with her hand. He leaned his back against the tree and lit a cigar.

"What on earth is the meaning of this scene?" he asked.

"That is the great Midsummer Jinks ceremony of the Bohemian Club. They have it every year, and never invite outsiders. So I was bound I'd see it, anyhow."

"I wonder you don't become a member."

"Oh, I'm too young," promptly.

"Tell me more about it. What do these ceremonies mean?"

"Oh, they put all sorts of things into that caldron—the liver of a grasshopper with one of Harry Armstrong's jokes; the wasted paint on somebody's last picture with the misshapen feet of somebody's else latest verse. The corpse is an effigy of Care, and they are cremating him. Now they'll be happy, that is to say, drunk, till morning, for Care is dead. I'm going to stop and see it out."

"I think you had better go home."

"Indeed?" Clive saw the hand that shielded her face jerk.

"Did you ever see, or rather hear a lot of men on a lark when they fancied that no women were about?"

"No; but that is what I wish to do."

"Which you are not going to do to-night."

There was a sudden snapping of dry leaves.

A small foot had come down with emphasis.

"*What* do you mean?"

"That this is no place for a woman, and that you must go."

"I'm not—well, I am, and I don't care in the least whether you know it or not. I wish you to understand, sir, that I shall stay here, and that I am not in the habit of being dictated to."

"You are Miss Belmont, I suppose."

An instant's pause. Then she replied, with a haughty pluck which delighted him:

"Yes, I am Miss Belmont, and you are an insolent Englishman."

"How do you know that I am an Englishman?"

"Any one could tell from your voice and your overbearing manner."

"Well, I am," said Clive, much amused.

"I detest Englishmen."

"Smoke a little, or I am afraid you will cry."

She obeyed with unexpected docility, but in a moment crushed the coal of her cigarette on a damp tree stump. Then she turned to him and folded her arms.

"I am not going to leave," she said evenly. "What are you going to do about it?"

"How did you get here?"

"On my horse."

"Where is he?"

"Tethered off the road."

"Very well; if you are not on that horse in five minutes, I shall carry you to it, and what is more, I shall kiss you."

She deliberately moved into the light and pushed her cap to the back of her head, disarranging a mass of curling dark hair. Her coloring was indefinable in the red light, but her eyes were large and long, and heavily lashed. They sparkled wickedly. The nostrils of her finely cut nose were dilating; her short upper lip was lifted. Clive ardently hoped that she would continue to defy him. Her whole attitude was that of a young worldling, delighting in an unforeseen adventure.

"Who are you anyhow?" she demanded, "Of course I could see at once that you were a gentleman, or I should not have taken the slightest notice of you."

"Thanks. My name is Owin Clive."

"Oh, you are Mary Gordon's friend, that she has been expecting."

"Miss Gordon is an old friend of mine." He half consciously hoped that Miss Belmont did not know of his engagement.

"She says you are frightfully handsome."

Clive laughed. "I cannot imagine Miss Gordon using any such expression; but then she has been two years in California."

"I suppose Englishmen can't help being rude. I remember exactly what she said, and she said it so slowly and placidly. 'Oh, yes, dear Miss Belmont, I think our men are very fine-looking indeed.' (I had been blackguarding them.) 'My friend, Mr. Clive, of whom you have heard me speak, is quite the handsomest man I have ever seen."

"That sounds more like it. And that is exactly what she would have said two years ago. I mean," laughing with some embarrassment, "the way she would have expressed herself."

"Oh, I suppose you are a mass of vanity; all men are. Yes; your Mary Gordon is as English as if she had never left Hertfordshire. And always will be. She hasn't a spark of originality."

Clive discerned her purpose, but he replied coldly, "Say rather that she has individuality."

"Which she hasn't, and you know it. I have that. Do you think there is much in common between us?"

"How can I tell after knowing you ten minutes?"

"I can't get a rise out of you, I see. You Englishmen are such phlegmatic creatures. I don't believe there is a spark of impulse left in your island."

"You are a very brave young woman."

"Why?" She drew her eyelashes together, shooting forth audacity.

"Do you want me to kiss you?"

The muscles of her face twitched angrily.

"An Englishman's only idea of wit is impertinence."

"What have Englishmen done to you that you are so bitter? I don't believe

those lordlings I have heard of proposed, after all."

"They did," replied Miss Belmont emphatically, and quite restored. "Every last one of them. I made Dynebor fetch and carry like a trained dog. It was great fun. I used to say, before a room full of people, 'Go get my fan, little man; I left it with Charley Rollins in the conservatory.' And he would trot off; he was that hard up, poor thing!"

"I am glad you did not marry any of them; I am sure they were not good enough for you."

"How polite of you. Why don't you step out and let me see you?"

"My vanity will not permit. I feel sure that your remarkable frankness would not allow you to disguise your disappointment."

"Well, I shall see you on Sunday. You are coming with Miss Gordon to dine with me. She has accepted for you."

"I shall wait until then. I look better in evening clothes and when I am clean."

"I like your voice and your figure, and you certainly have a remarkable amount of magnetism," she said meditatively. "Good heavens! what a row those idiots are making. And do look at that bonfire. It looks for all the world as if the earth had run its tongue out at the moon."

Clive wondered why he did not kiss her. He certainly wanted to, and he certainly would have been justified. He recalled no other attractive woman who would have had to offer half the encouragement with which Miss Belmont had recklessly toyed. A man who coined epigrams for sale had once said of him; "Clive is thoroughbred; he can drink the strongest whiskey, smoke the blackest cigars, and he never fails to kiss a pretty woman when the opportunity offers." And yet, so far, something about Miss Belmont stayed him. He had no intention that it should endure, however.

The scene was growing more and more picturesque. Behind them was a great roar, crossed by the howling and yelling of two hundred and twenty-one abandoned throats. The remotest aisles of the forest were crimson. Every needle of the delicate young redwoods, every waving frond was etched minutely on the red transparency. The thousand columns with their stark capitals wore a softened and gracious aspect, albeit the general effect of the night was infernal.

"Are you going?" asked Clive.

"No." She curled her lips defiantly away from her teeth.

Clive crossed the short space between them with one step, lifted her in his arms and walked rapidly up the trail. For a moment she was too stupefied to protest; then she attempted violently to free herself.

"What do you mean?" she cried furiously. "Do you know who I am? I am in the habit of doing exactly as I please. Every-

body knows me, here. If you have misunderstood me it's because you are a thick-headed Englishman, used to women who are either stupid or bad."

"You mean that the men you surround yourself with are idiots who permit you to play with them as you choose. Keep quiet. Don't you see that you can't get away? If you struggle I shall hurt you, and I don't want to do that."

"I have sat up all night with men and they have never dared to kiss me, however much they may have wanted to."

"Then they were rotters, and you can tell them so, with my compliments. If I sat up all night with you, I should kiss you, and several times."

"Well, you never will!"

They reached the road. She stiffened suddenly and tried to spring out of his arms. He placed her on her feet and grasped her firmly by the shoulders.

"Now," he said, "kiss me, and don't be silly about it. If you go in for larks of this sort you must take the consequences." She wrenched again. He caught and held her so firmly that she could not struggle.

"You brute of an Englishman," she gasped.

Clive clasped his hand about the lower part of her face and lifted it gently. As he did so he shifted his position and the light, for the first time, shone full on his face. The girl became suddenly quiet. Something leaped into her eyes which his own answered. But as he bent his face, she moved her head backward along his shoulder.

"Please, *please*, don't," she said beseechingly. "Oh, please, don't."

Clive let her go. He walked with her to the horse, mounted her, and watched her dash away.

"What a stupid ass I am," he thought. "Why on earth didn't I kiss that woman?"

He walked up the road for a few moments, then turned and made for the clearing.

The flames were still leaping symmetrically upward into a dense column of smoke, the men still dancing about the pyre, their enthusiasm unabated. As Clive suddenly appeared in their midst an immediate and disagreeable silence fell. Clive had never felt so uncomfortable in his life. He concealed a certain amount of natural shyness under a haughty bearing, which would have repelled strangers had it not been for his charm of expression, the quick laughter of his eyes.

"Does Mr. Charles Rollins happen to be here?" he asked stiffly. "I have brought a letter to him. My name is Clive. I have an apology to make. I stumbled upon your strange ceremony and watched it, not knowing at the time that there was anything private about it——"

"Don't mention it. Don't mention it," cried a hearty voice. A young man pushed forward from the back of the circle and grasped his hand. "I had a letter from Stanley and hoped you would get here in time for this. You can make up for being late only by drinking six quarts of fizz between now and sunrise. Boys, come up and shake."

Clive's hand was shaken, with a solemnity which at first embarrassed, then amused him, by every man present. Then solemnity vanished, and with it any lingering remnant of Clive's shyness.

The odor of savory viands mingled with burning pitch and the subtler perfumes of the forest. A great table was spread. Champagne corks flew. Before an hour was done, Clive was voted the liveliest Englishman, that had ever set foot in California, and elected off-hand an honorary member of the Bohemian Club.

CHAPTER II.

AT four o'clock Clive once more started for Yorba. He had not drunk six quarts of champagne, but he had commanded the respect of his comrades by the courage with which he had mixed his drinks. Rollins had held his head under a waterfall, in the little river, but it still felt very large. He took off his straw hat and looked at it resentfully. Why had he not worn his traveling cap? He also felt depressed, and reproached himself vehemently. What must Mary Gordon think? Doubtless she was sitting up waiting for him, and thought him dead —murdered. Nevertheless he had enjoyed himself thoroughly, and he found remorse more coy than he would have wished. He had an uneasy consciousness that if his head did not ache so confoundedly he would not feel remorse at all.

His thoughts wandered to Miss Belmont. "I believe I found the woman for the forest, after all. I wonder if she would fit it as well now. Perhaps, in another mood. I fancy she is a woman of many."

The redwoods were dripping with mist, itself as motionless as the silent trees it shrouded. It filled every hollow, was banked in every aisle, lay like silver cobweb on the young redwoods and ferns. It emphasized the ghastly silence. Not a bird was awake, not a crawling thing moved. Once a panther cried far up on the mountain, but that was all.

Clive came upon the hotel an hour later, a long rough wooden structure at the foot of the mountain, up which straggled many cottages. Hard by, across a little creek, were a saloon and billiard-room. As he ascended the steps, a stout man with a red heavy face, came out of the office, stretching himself.

"You're Mr. Clive, the Gordons' friend, I surmise," he said.

"I hope they haven't sat up for me." He devoutly hoped they had not.

"They hain't. Miss Gordon waited till twelve, then concluded you'd fallen in with the Bohemian Club, as she knowed you'd brought a letter to Rollins. Jedging by the looks of you, I should say you had. Come over to the bar and taper off. My name's Hart, and I run this hotel."

"Thank you," said Clive grimly, "but I'll have no more to-night. Be good enough to show me to my room, and be sure to have me wakened at eight. I suppose Mr. and Miss Gordon are not up before then. If they are, please give them my compliments and tell them that I did fall in with the Bohemian Club."

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Clive awoke and looked at his watch, it was a quarter to three in the afternoon. He sprang out of bed in dismay. He was an ideal lover! If Mary Gordon sent him about his business he could not question the justice of the act. After a hurried tub and toilet he went in search of his landlord.

"Why in thunder didn't you call me at eight?" he asked savagely.

"Miss Gordon was up at seven, mister, and she gave strict orders that you was not to be disturbed. I'm to take you over to her cottage the minute you show up, and to send a broiled chicken after you."

"She's an angel," thought Clive, "and will certainly make an ideal wife."

He followed his host out of the hotel and up the hill. The summer girl in pink and

blue, sailor hat and shirt-waist, dotted the greenery; in rare instances attended by a swain. On the piazzas of the hotel and cottages older women knitted or read novels.

The day was very warm. The sun shone down into the forest above and about the cottages, where the trees were not so densely planted as in the depths. The under forest looked very green and fresh. A creek murmured somewhere. Bees hummed drowsily.

Clive's head still ached and he was hungry; but at this moment he was conscious of nothing but a paramount wish to see Mary Gordon.

Mr. Gordon, a pink-faced man with white side-whiskers, was standing on the piazza of a tiny cottage which looked as if it had been built in a night. He winked at Clive as he came down and shook him heartily by the hand. He had loved his wife and been kind to her, but had always done exactly as he pleased.

"She's inside," he whispered, "and I don't think she'll row you. Sorry it happened, just vow it never will again, and she'll forget it. They always do, bless them!"

Clive went hastily into the little parlor. Mary Gordon was standing in the middle of the room, her hands tightly clasped, her eyes very bright, her upper lip caught between her teeth. Clive saw in a glance that she had more style and grace of carriage than when she had left England. Her hair was more fashionably arranged, and altogether she was a handsomer girl. He took her in his arms and kissed her many times, and she cried softly on his shoulder. He humbled himself to the dust, and was told that he must always do exactly what he wanted; and he felt a distinct thrill of pleasurable domestic anticipation. He had been spoiled all his life, and would have taken to matrimonial discipline very unkindly.

When he had eaten of the broiled chicken

and several other substantial delicacies, and was at peace with himself and the world once more, he went for a long walk in the forest with Mary. After a time they sat down on a log, and he lit his pipe and tried to imagine an environment of English oaks and beeches. Again and more forcibly he felt the discordance between the English girl, simplified by generations of discipline and homogeneous traditions, and this green light, this strange brooding silence, this vast solitude suggesting a new world, a new race, an unimaginable future,—this hot, electric, sensuous air.

They talked of the past two years, and of their future together.

"I have not told any one yet that we are engaged," said Mary. "People here don't seem to take things as seriously as we do, and I could not stand being chaffed about it. I have merely said that we expected an old and dear friend of the family."

"I am glad. It's a bore to be chaffed."

"Of course I have written to all our friends in England that we are to be married on the twelfth; but as the wedding is to be so quiet, it is not necessary to tell anyone here."

"How do you like this country?" he asked curiously. "I mean how does it suit you personally? Of course, I know you would make up your mind to like any place where duty happened to take you, but you must have a private little idea on the subject, and it is your duty to tell me everything."

She smiled happily. "'Well!' as they say here, now that I am sure that Edith will make papa comfortable, I shall be glad enough to go back to England. California doesn't suit me at all. It rubs me the wrong way. I think I should develop nerves if I stayed here much longer. Americans don't seem to me to be half human. Helena Bel-

mont says that America will be the greatest nation on earth when it gets a soul, but that it is nothing but a kicking, squalling, precocious infant at present; and that if some one were clever enough to stick his finger in the soft spot on the top of its head, it would transform it into an idiot or a corpse; but that America will pull through all right because she has so many weak points that her enemies forget which is the weakest. Miss Belmont is so clever. You will meet her on Sunday. You don't mind my having accepted an invitation for you to dine there?"

"Not at all. It was very kind of you, I am sure. I have heard of this Miss Belmont; I don't imagine you find much in common with her."

"She horrifies me, but she fascinates me more than any person I have met here. I am sure she is a good woman, in spite of the reckless things she does. Your friend, Mr.

Rollins, says that she is the concentrated essence of California, and I always excuse her on that ground. You never know what she is going to do or say next; and she is the most desperate flirt I ever heard of. I suppose she is so beautiful she can't help it. Her eyes always seem to be looking at you through tears, even when they are laughing or flirting, although I don't believe she sheds many. I cannot imagine her crying, although I know her to be kind-hearted, and generous, and impulsive."

"Do you call it kind-hearted to throw fifteen men over?"

"I told her once that I thought it was morally wrong for her to lure men on to such a terrible awakening, and she said that there was just one thing that man didn't know, which was woman; and that it was her duty to her sex to addle their brains on the subject as much as possible. But I want you to know me, Owin."

"The better I know you, the better I shall love you."

"When your eyes laugh like that I never know whether you are chaffing me or not. It will not take long, for I am not clever;" she smiled a little sadly. "You are so clever that I know you will often want to go and talk to women who know more than I do; but none of them will ever love you so well."

"I know it," he said tenderly, and he believed what he said.

"I am glad that I have been in California, though," pursued Mary. "It has broadened me. At home we take it for granted that all the unconventional people are bad, and all the conventional ones good, Here it is so different; although I must say that I never heard so much petty gossip and scandal in my life as there is in the smart set in San Francisco. All visitors remark that; I suppose it is because they have so little to do and think about. It is very slow here socially;

and I suppose that is what makes some of the women do such outlandish things—that and the country, for even the quiet ones are not exactly like other people. One can judge for oneself. I have often pinned the tattlers down when they were abusing Helena Belmont, for instance, and they could not verify a single statement."

"Women know each other very little," said Clive.

CHAPTER IV.

HE passed his nights in the Bohemian Club camp, his mornings in bed, the remaining hours wandering about with his betrothed; and felt that altogether life was not understood by the pessimists. England, with the struggles and cares and responsibilities it held in store for him, seemed to exist only between the rusty covers of history, and life a thing to be dawdled away in a wonderful forest, where the very air made a man hate the thought of all that was hard and ugly and too serious.

Clive was something more than curious to see Miss Belmont again, but hardly knew whether he ought to go to her house or not. It was possible that she expected him to decline an invitation proffered before an unpleasant adventure; but unless he pleaded sudden illness he did not see his way out of

acceptance. On Saturday, however, Mary received a note from the *châtelaine* of Casa del Norte, reminding her of the dinner and of her promise to bring Mr. Clive.

"Charley Rollins tells me that he is the best all-round Englishman he has ever known," the note concluded; "not the least bit of a cad. I am most anxious to meet him."

Mary laughed as she handed the note to Clive. "If any other woman had written that I'd never enter her house again. But, somehow, you let her say and do exactly what she chooses. The trouble is that the only Englishmen she has met have been fortune hunters. When we are married I'll ask her over to visit us, and let her meet men who are almost as perfect as you are.'

Clive said, "Yes, dear," absently. Three days of unshifting devotion had blunted the fine point of his content.

The next day Mary was prostrate with

one of the severe headaches to which she was subject, and sent Clive off with Charley Rollins to the dinner.

"Go, go, my boy," Mr. Gordon had said to him, when Clive had displayed a decent amount of reluctance; "she'll be too ill to be spoken to for twenty-four hours. You could do no good by hanging round."

During the hour's drive through the redwoods Clive said to Rollins:

"You are a great friend of Miss Belmont, are you not?"

"I am, for a fact."

"Have you known her long?"

"She nearly scratched my eyes out when she was three and I five. I've adored her ever since, and think the reason I've been able to hang on successfully is because I've never proposed to her."

"I've heard several opinions of her, and I'd like yours. I can't say that, so far, I've met any one likely to understand her. You

should, particularly as you have never made love to her."

Rollins half closed his shrewd, dark eyes, and tilted his hat over his nose. Like all San Francisco men, he looked carelessly dressed, although in evening clothes, and carried himself badly ; but his face was clear and refined, his hair and beard trimly cut.

"Helena Belmont," he said, in what the club called his "summing-up voice," "has the genius of California in her, like Sibyl Sanderson and a dozen others I could mention without stopping to think, although they would be mere names to you. You see, it is like this : all sorts of men came here in early days—poor men of good family who had failed at home, or were too proud to work there ; desperadoes, adventurers, men of middle life and broken fortunes—all of them expecting everything from the new land, and ready to tear the heart out of any-

one who got in their way. It was every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost. Many succeeded. Some of their methods will not bear the fierce light of history. That savage spirit, that instinct to trample to a goal over anything or anybody, that intolerance of restraint, still lingers in the very atmosphere, and is quick in the blood of many of the present generation, although, strangely enough, it has given a distincter individuality to the women than to the men. Of course, there are Californians and Californians. It is always a mistake to generalize too freely, but the type I speak of is the most significant, although you will find no Californian exactly like any other American. This is the land of the composite. All America and all Europe have emptied themselves into it. God knows what it will sift down to eventually—the commonplace, probably. As for Helena Belmont, Jack Belmont, her father, came here in the fifties,

and hung up his shingle. He was one of the cleverest lawyers the State has had. He rarely drew a sober breath, and was never seen to stagger; he was an inveterate gambler, and a terror with women. He married a Miss Lowell, of Boston, who came out here on a visit—a beautiful girl; and God knows what she went through with him. You may be surprised that she married him. I may have given you the impression that he was a cowboy in a red shirt and sombrero. Jack Belmont was one of the most elegant men this State has ever seen, a gentleman when he was drunkest, and the idol of the Southern set, a strong contingent here. There you have the elements of which Helena Belmont is made up. She has the blood of Cavaliers and Roundheads in her veins; she grew up amidst the clash of the South against the North, for no two people could ever have been more unmated than her mother and father; and she was born in

California, nurtured on its new savage traditions, and mentally and temperamentally fitted to draw in twice her measure of its atmosphere. She does what she pleases, because she would never know if she were beaten, has a tremendous personality, and a million dollars. Here we are."

CHAPTER V.

THE forest had ended abruptly. They had come upon a large low adobe house on a plateau, looking down over a shelving table-land upon the ocean, a mile below.

"It's about eighty years old," said Rollins, "which is antique in this country. It belonged to one of the grandees of the old time, and Miss Belmont bought it shortly after her father's death. She has several houses, but this is her favorite. It has about thirty rooms, and there have been some jolly good times up here, I can tell you. Those are the original tiles and the original walls, but everything else has been pretty well modernized, except that old orchard you see on the other side, and the vineyard and rose-garden."

They dismounted at an open gateway in a high adobe wall, and entered a large orderless garden. The air was sweet with the delicate perfume of Castilian roses, whose green, thorny bushes, thick with pink, rioted over the walls, up the oaks, across the paths, and looked as if no hand had cut or trimmed them since the old Spaniard had coaxed them from the soil, nearly a century ago.

"She hates modern gardens," said Rollins, "and has never had a gardener in this. We'd prefer to walk without leaving ourselves in shreds and patches on the thorns, but if suits her I suppose it's all right."

They entered the house opposite a courtyard filled with palm trees and rustic chairs. A large, curiously modelled fountain, which Rollins told Clive was the work of the old Franciscans, splashed lazily. Several young men were swinging in hammocks on the corridor which traversed the four

sides of the court. A Chinese servant, in blouse and pendent cue, was passing cocktails.

Rollins conducted Clive into a small drawing-room, fitted in copper-colored silken stuffs, and overlooking the ocean. Neither Miss Belmont nor her aunt was present, and Rollins introduced Clive to the assembled guests, with running foot-notes not intended for the ear of the subject.

"Miss Lord,"—presenting Clive to a tall handsome, scornful-looking girl,—"she tears out reputations with her teeth. Miss Carter,—a clever little snob, who is a joy to flirt with because you know she is too selfish to fall in love with you. Mrs. Lent,—an army flirt, who has done much to educate the youth of San Francisco. Mrs. Volney, —a widow with a commanding talent for marrying and burying rich husbands. Miss Leonard,—who plays better than any woman in San Francisco, which is saying a

good deal; a lovely girl, if a trifle cold. Mrs. Tower,—a really charming young widow, with a voice as fiery as her eyes. Miss West,—who is half Spanish, a good deal of a prude, and a most accomplished flirt. Here comes Mrs. Cartright, who has the honor of being Miss Belmont's aunt, chaperon, and slave."

A middle-aged lady—small, stout, but with much dignity of bearing, her dark face refined and gentle—entered, and greeted Clive with the rich Southern brogue which twenty years of California had not tempered. As he exchanged platitudes with her, she reminded him of a gentle breeze which had wandered aimlessly in, barely touching his cheek. She talked incessantly, and wholly without consequence.

Clive had created a perceptible flutter among the women. Being a shy man, he was painfully aware that every eye in the room was upon him, and that he was being

discussed behind more than one fan. The other men—society youths—had entered, and looked crude and new beside him. He had the straight figure of the athlete, and carried his clothes in a manner which made Rollins feel, as he confided to Miss Carter, like hitching up his trousers. His closely cut hair was almost black; his moustache the color of straw, and as uneven as frequent conflagations could make it, fell over a delicately cut, strong, mobile mouth. It had taken many generations to breed his profile —so delicate and sensitive was it, yet so strong. His eyes were grey and well set, full of humor and fire. The chin and neck were a trifle heavy. There was something very splendid about the whole appearance of the man, and he filled the eye whenever he stood in a room.

Mrs. Cartwright's fluttering attention having been deflected elsewhere, he plunged his hands into his pockets and talked to

Mrs. Volney, whose *crêpe* set off a pair of shoulders of which he approved. She was a remarkably pretty women, with large innocent-looking green eyes and golden hair, and conversed with a babyish inflection which he thought very fetching. In a moment he forgot her, and went toward the door with Rollins. Miss Belmont had entered.

The pink color in her face flamed for a moment, but her eyes lit with an admiration so unmistakable that Clive, too, colored and laughed nervously. He wondered if his eyes were as frank as hers. Her tall, slim figure was very round; the delicate neck carried no superfluous flesh, but was apparently boneless. The small proud head was poised well back. Clive knew her features; but the rich mahogany-brown hair, crisp and electric, and curling unmanageably, the dark blue eyes, the warm whiteness of skin, the pink of cheek and lips, were the spendid

finish of a hasty sketch. Her white gown was of some silken stuff embroidered with silver, and pearls were in her hair and about her throat. She looked as proud and calm and well-conducted as a young empress.

"Of course this is Mr. Clive," she said. "You are not at all necessary, Charley. I am so sorry Miss Gordon is ill. Give me your arm; dinner is ready. I know that you have not told any one," she murmured, as they walked down the corridor.

"How do you know? It is a good story, and I may have told it all over the place."

"I am sure you have not even told it to Miss Gordon."

"Why Miss Gordon?" he asked, smiling into her frankly curious eyes.

"Are you engaged to her?"

He laughed but made no reply.

"I don't believe you are," she said abruptly, after they were seated. "You don't look the least bit as if any one owned you."

"Why did you make an English room of this? It might have been taken bodily out of some old manor house. These Chinamen in it are an anomaly. I should have thought you would rather preserve the character of the country."

"The old Californians had no taste whatever about interiors—whitewashed walls and hair-cloth furniture. Besides, we have just about as much of California out here as we can stand, and like to import something else into it occasionally."

There were eighteen people at table. The conversation was principally about other people. Occasionally, a current novel or play captured a few moments' attention, but the talk soon swung triumphantly back to personalities. Clive had never seen so many pretty women together. One or two were beautiful. The dense blackness of Mrs. Tower's hair, the red and olive of her skin, the high cheek bones, inadvertently modelled features, and

fierce eyes suggested Indian ancestry. Miss West's soft Spanish eyes languished or coquetted, but there was a New England meagreness about her mouth. Miss Leonard, with her *cendré* hair, and cold regular features, might have had all the blood of all the Howards in her. Mrs. Lent had a dark piquant Franco-American face. Miss Carter was very small, very dignified, with large cool intelligent grey eyes, abundant yellow hair, and an Irish nose and upper lip. All had the slight bust and generous development of hip and leg peculiar to the Californian women. The men interested Clive less; they looked very ordinary society youths, and he wondered if Rollins could not dispose of them collectively in an epigram.

He quarrelled intermittently with Miss Belmont: they did not hit it off. Nevertheless, he wondered if it could be the rashling he had met in the forest. She still wore her regal air and would have looked as cold as

one of the fine marbles in her drawing-room, had it not been for her lavish coloring. She took little part in the general conversation, and he said to her abruptly :

"These people don't seem to interest you."

"I'm tired to death of them. I'll turn them all out presently. I bought this place to be near the redwoods, which I love better than anything in the world, and I like to entertain by fits and starts. I spent last winter here alone."

"I should like to have known you then. When you get time to think about yourself, you must be a charming egoist."

"You have the most impertinent tongue and the most flirtatious eyes I have ever met."

"Where is the man you are engaged to?"

"Up at Shasta and the lava beds. He will be back in a few days. You will like him."

"Is he a good fellow?"

"Yes," with friendly enthusiasm; "an awfully good fellow."

"You don't love him, though."

Her lashes half met—a habit they had. "No," she said, "I don't believe I do."

"Helena! Helena!" cried Rollins. "Clive, I feel it my duty to tell you that she is engaged, and for the fifteenth time."

"He has been telling me that I am not in love with Mr. Van Rhuys, and intimating that he has come just in time to save me from a fatal mistake."

She looked charmingly impertinent, her eyes half closed, her chin lifted, her pink lips pouting from their classic lines.

Clive was somewhat taken aback, but replied promptly, "If I disclaim, it is from timidity, not lack of gallantry: I fear I should learn more than I have the power to teach."

Everybody laughed. Miss Belmont's eyes sparkled. "You mean," she said, when the attention of the others was once more

diverted, "that you are not going to fall in love with me. Everybody does, you know. I never mind surrounding myself with beautiful women, because I am much more fascinating than any of them."

"I am hopelessly unoriginal, but I shall make a desperate effort this time."

"Why do you say that? You look quite unlike any one I have ever seen; I mean quite a different person looks out of your eyes." Her own eyes had a frankly speculative regard devoid of coquetry, Clive's masculine vanity warmed.

"You read a great deal I hear," he said.

"What an extraordinary way you have of ignoring what a person says to you. Are you absent-minded, or deaf, or merely impolite?"

"Merely an Englishman."

Miss Belmont's color deepened. Clive's eyes invoked a ridiculous picture of a stately young *châtelaine* kicking and struggling in an Englishman's arms.

"Why do the people of your country take pride in being rude?"

"They don't. They don't bother about trifles like the men of several other nations, that is all. I'll open the door for you when you leave the room, and even take off my hat in the lift and catch a cold in my head, but don't expect me to find a reply to all the nonsense a woman chooses to talk, if a more interesting subject occurs to me."

"Are you very haughty and supercilious, or are you very shy?"

"What does that mean?"

"I mean that you were flattered to death by what I said, and changed the subject, as a girl would blush or stammer."

"I suspect you are right." He rose to let her pass. His eyes laughed down into hers, and she felt the sudden content of a child when it is noticed by a person of superior years and stature.

"That man has the most charming eyes

I ever saw," she said, as the dining-room door closed behind the women. "I don't believe they ever could be sober."

"Just observe his lower jaw," said Mrs. Volney, with her infantile lisp.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN the men left the dining-room they found the women in the patio, or scattered about the corridor. There was no moon, but the clear sky blazed with stars, and colored lanterns swung between the pillars or among the broad leaves of the palm-trees. The girls (the married women were little more) had thrown lace or silken scarves over their heads, and fluttered their fans idly. Clive recalled all he had read of the old time, and imagined himself back among the careless dons and doñas who lived for little but pleasure, and had not a prescience of the complex civilization to enter their Arcadia and rout its very memory.

Miss Belmont was sitting on the corridor, leaning over the low balustrade, her hands

lightly clasped. She had draped a white lace mantilla about her head, and looked more Spanish than Miss West. It seemed to Clive that she had a faculty of looking whatever she wished. Some one handed her a guitar. She leaned against the pillar and tuned it absently. Clive walked over and stood staring down on her, his hands in his pockets. She sang, in a rich contralto voice, a Spanish song, whose words he could not understand, but which was the most passionate he had ever heard. Her head was thrown back. She sang frankly to Clive; her face changed with every line.

When it was over, Mrs. Cartright breathed a plaintive sigh. "That's the handsomest song that Helena sings," she announced.

Helena arose abruptly. "Come," she said to Clive. "Let us go for a walk."

He followed her out into the rose-garden. There were no lanterns here, and it looked wilder than by day. The air was very

warm and sweet. Helena plucked one of the pink Castilian roses, and fastened back her mantilla with it, exposing a charming ear.

"You will never find any occupation so becoming to your hands," said Clive dutifully. "Are your feet as perfect?"

"They are something to dream of," said Miss Belmont flippantly.

They went out on to the terrace. The ocean pounded monotonously, tossing spray high into the air. Clive looked at his companion. Her head was thrown back, her lips were slightly apart. She looked like a woman who held a ball of fire between her finger-tips, and toyed with it caressingly.

"Shall we walk along the cliffs?"

She hesitated a moment. "No; let us go into the forest."

As they entered they were greeted by a rush of cool, perfumed air, the scent of wild lilac and lily, the strong, bracing odor of redwood and pine. For a hundred yards

or more there was little brush; the great trees stood far apart; but as they left the plateau and ascended a narrow trail, the young redwoods and ferns and lilacs grew thick. It was a hard pull and they said little. He helped her up the almost perpendicular ascent, over fallen trees and rocks, and huge roots springing across the path like pythons, and wondered if they were penetrating wilds hitherto sacred to the red man. Presently the low roar of water greeted them, and pushing their way through a small grove of ferns they came upon the high bank of a broad creek. Beyond and around rose the dark, rigid forest, but into the opening the stars flung plentiful light. They revealed the clear rapid rush of water over huge stones and logs that looked like living things, great bunches of maiden-hair springing from dripping boulders, the dark, mysterious perspective of the creek.

Clive did not wonder if he would lose his head. He had no intention of keeping it.

"Sit down," she said, arranging herself on a fallen pine and leaning against a redwood. Clive made himself as comfortable as he could, and she gave him permission to light his pipe.

The lace mantilla, in spite of brush and briar, still clung to her head and shoulders. She looked very lovely and womanly.

"Why did you bring me here?" he asked. "You told me the other night that you would never trust yourself alone with me. This is equivalent to saying that you want me to make love to you. I am quite ready."

"How brutally abrupt you are. I don't want you to make love to me. I meant to tell you before we started that I did not expect it. Most women do, I know, and it must be such a relief to a man to be let off occasionally." She opened and closed her

large fan, with a graceful motion of the wrist, and then turned and looked straight at him.

"I have never walked alone with a man in this forest before," she said; "neither at night nor in the daytime. It would have been spoiled for me if I had."

He pulled at his pipe. "You are a very brave woman. If what you say is true, what is your reason for bringing me here?"

"I felt a desire to do so, and I always obey my whims."

"You know that my vanity is touched to the quick. But will you tell me why you are doing all you can to turn my head, if you don't want me to make love to you?"

"I do want you to."

Clive laid down his pipe.

"No! It would be a pity to let it go out, and it might set my forest on fire. Do let me finish. Women are not like men. A man is fascinated by a woman, and his one impulse is to get at her, and without loss of

time; a woman may have the same impulse, but the dislike of being won too quickly, the desire to be sure of herself, above all, the wish to make the man more serious—all these things hold her back. So I don't want you to make love to me to-night."

"Which means that I may later?"

"I don't know. That will depend on a good many things, one of which is whether I break my engagement with Schuyler Van Rhuys or not. I have some slight sense of honor."

Clive colored hotly, and for the moment his ardor left him.

"Are you thinking of breaking it off?"

"Somewhat."

"Is it true that you have been engaged fifteen times?"

"No; only eight. I have not yet discovered that there are fifteen interesting men in the world. I have only met nine."

"You can flatter charmingly. But you

say you have a sense of honor. What would you think of a man who deceived and jilted eight girls?"

"It is quite different with a man: women are so helpless. But when a woman has the reputation of being fickle, men know what to expect and propose with their eyes open. As a matter of fact, there is not an atom of the flirt in me; of coquetry, perhaps, for I have an irrepressible desire to please the man who has pleased me. To most men I am clay. I am doing all I can to fascinate you, and I shall continue to do so. I engaged myself to each of those eight men, honestly believing that I could love him—that I had found a companion. If I ever suffered the delusion that any one of them was my *grande passion*, the delusion was brief. Still, I gave up all idea of that some years ago. With each of those men I set myself honestly to work to get into sympathy, and to love him. Of course, you will understand that I had

been more or less fascinated in each case. If a man has not magnetism for me, he might have every other quality given to mortal, and he would not attract my passing interest. Well, I could not find anything in any one of them to get hold of. One cannot love a clever mind, nor personal magnetism, nor a charming trick of manner, nor a kind heart; nor all. There is something else. One hates to be sentimental, but I suppose what those men have lacked is soul. Our men don't seem to have time for that. It isn't in the make-up of this country. Perhaps I haven't it; but, at all events, I have a mental conception of it, and know that it is what I want."

Clive puffed at his pipe for a moment.

"Are you talking pretty nonsense," he asked, "or do you mean that?"

She turned her head away angrily.

"You are just like other men" she said. "I have always been laughed or stared at

by every man I have ever had the courage to broach the subject to. I was a fool to speak to you. It is two or three years since I let myself go like this."

"I am not laughing. It is a very serious subject: the most serious in life. Girls and men and minor poets are always prating of it, but it is a good subject to keep quiet about until you understand it."

"Don't you think I understand about it?"

"I think you will some time—yes, certainly. And you had better not marry Mr. Van Rhuys."

"We are so new," she said, leaning her elbows on her knees, her chin on her clasped hands. "It is as if the Almighty had flung a lot of brilliant particles together, which cohered symmetrically, and so quickly that the spiritual essence of the universe had no time to crawl inside. I stayed here last winter by myself trying to solve the prob-

lem of life, but I only addled my brain. I read and read and read, and thought and thought and thought, and in the end I felt sadder, but not wiser."

"You can't find it alone."

She flushed and he saw her eyes deepen.

"Then Schuyler Van Rhuys turned up, and I concluded that the best thing I could do was to go to New York and cut a dash in the smart set. And he is such a good fellow. He would fight superbly if there were a war; he would carry me safely out of a mob: he would always be kind, and in a manner companionable, for he is well up on affairs and current art and literature. I should like you to know him, for he is one of the best types of American you will ever meet. But—there is nothing else. And I am the stronger of the two. There is nothing as solitary as that."

"Don't marry him. You have no excuse —at your age and with your brain. Wait

until you find the right man, even if it is a million years hence."

"Oh, I've heard that——" She paused abruptly. "It isn't like you to talk exaggerated nonsense. What did you mean by that last?"

"What I said."

Her lip curled. "You don't mean to say that you believe in a life after this—you."

"Why not?"

"Well, do explain."

"I don't see why any belief of mine should interest you."

"But it does. Tell me!"

"This not my hour for lecturing. I'd much rather talk about you."

"Oh, please don't be unhumanly modest. Go on, you've roused my curiosity now, and I will know what you think."

"Very well. Not being an unreasoning oyster, I believe in a future state. Not in

the old-fashioned business, of course; but if a man has ever thought, and if he has had two or three generations of thinking ancestors behind him, he hardly believes that the scheme of creation is so purposeless as to turn people of progressive development loose on one unsatisfactory plane, only." Clive spoke rapidly when he spoke at length, but paused abruptly every now and again, then resumed without impulsion. "What would be the object? What the meaning? Everything else in the scheme of creation has a meaning, leads to something definite. . . .That is the significance of the lack of soul you search for in a race of men that have not yet had time to develop it—who are yet surely progressing toward such a consummation. . . . On this earth it takes generations of leisure, of art, of literature, of science, but mainly of individual thinking, to develop the subtle combination which puts man in relation with the divine principle in

the universe. The pre-eminent development of England over all the other nations is as indisputable as it is natural. What would be the object of such mental and spiritual develment if this incomplete life of ours were all? We go on afterward, of course; ascending by slow and laborious evolution, from plane to plane."

"And about the other thing? You believe that in one existence or another you meet the person who satisfies you in all things—your other part?"

"Perhaps two in a century meet in this existence. But most of us don't—for centuries. Perhaps millions of centuries. Time is nothing. Your man may not be born here for several centuries—but you will find him some time. And when you do, you and he will become biunial—one in a sense that I believe passes all understanding here—except, perhaps, that of the one or two fortunate ones of each century or so. . . .

The ancients had some such idea when they took Eve out of Adam."

Helena rose and went to the edge of the creek. She stood there without speaking for ten minutes, kicking the stones down into the water. Then she turned about.

"I have always looked upon that sort of thing as poetical rot," she said; "beneath the consideration of any one of the higher order of intelligence; probably because in this country, particularly in this State, everything occult, except religion, and sometimes that, is enveloped fifteen times over in vulgar and mercenary fraud. Even well written treatises on such subjects have never interested me—my American intolerance of anything which cannot be demonstrated, I suppose. But if a man like you believes, it makes one think."

She came and sat close beside him on the log, her gown brushing his feet.

"It is true—" she began.

"This is hardly fair, you know," said Clive.

"What?"

"You know as well as I do. If I am not to make love to you—and in a way you have placed me on my honor—go and sit at the other end of the log."

"Pshaw! After what you have just said, you should be above such things."

"I am not a spirit yet, please remember. And I am not by any means so highly developed as I ought to be. If you don't go away I shall take hold of you."

Helena went back to her former position.

"The Delilah becomes you," he pursued, "until one realizes that it is not you at all. You look the most womanly of women now that you have forgotten you brought me here to make a fool of me——"

"I did not! Indeed, I did not. I brought you here because I wanted to talk to you in this forest, and because the mo-

ment I saw you I recognized something in you that I have found in no other man."

"You take great risks, Miss Belmont; I should seize and kiss you after that remark, and you know it. To-morrow you will think me an ass because I did not, and I am."

"I want to talk some more about that thing. I thought as I stood by the creek, of our literature. Has it occurred to you that no American author has ever written a genuine all-round love scene? They are either thin or sensual, almost invariably the former. The soul and passion of the older races they have never developed. If a woman writer breaks out wildly sometimes, she merely voices the lack we all feel in this section of the world—in life as well as literature. That explains why I have tried to care for eight clever and interesting men and turned away chilled."

"You must love an Englishman," said Clive, smiling. "If you notice, a good many

American women do. An Englishwoman never marries an American. It goes to prove what I said a little while ago: leisure is needed for development; consequently the women of America have developed far more rapidly than the men."

"Don't imagine for a moment that I am disparaging my own country," said Helena hurriedly; "I am the best American in the world—I wouldn't be anything else; and I like and admire our men for their cleverness and pluck and wonderful go-aheadness. But I will confide to you something that I have never told a living soul—I have such a contempt for the Anglomaniac that I have a horror of being taken for one. It is this: something English in me has survived through five generations. I was brought up in a library of English literature; perhaps that fostered it. As long as I merely read and studied, I lived in imagination among English scenes and people—the people of

your history and those created by your authors and poets. Something in me responded to every line that I read; I felt at home; singularly enough much more so than when I finally visited England. Until a few years ago I could not force myself to read American literature—with the sole exception of Bret Harte. It is so cold, so slight, so forbidding. It is the piano of letters. Now, of course, I appreciate the mentality in it and the delicate art, the light rapid sketches of passing phases. And it seems to me that before we produce a Shakspere or Byron we shall have to relapse into barbarism, and emerge and develop by slow and sure stages to the condition of England when she evolved her great men. We have gone ahead too fast to ever become great from our present beginnings; we are all brilliant shallows and no depths."

"You disprove a good deal that you say."

Helena bent forward, pressing her chin

hard into the palm of her hand. She had forgotten that she was a beautiful woman, but even so she was graceful.

"If we Californians have a stronger fibre and richer blood in us than other Americans," she replied, "it is because we are cruder, savager, close to nature. I do things that no Eastern girl in the same social position would even think of doing, much less dare; but, on the other hand, I have a better chance of getting what I want out of life, for I go straight for it, undeterred by any traditions or scruples. And I have more to give."

She paused and Clive filled and lit another pipeful of tobacco.

"You take great satisfaction out of that pipe," she said pettishly.

"It is my only safeguard."

She laughed and he could see her flush.

"I suppose that English something in me, which has survived, was what sprang so instantly to you—recognition."

"You have been in England, and you have met many Englishmen."

"I have liked some of them tremendously, although I never would admit it, and always bullyragged them; that mixture of subtlety and brutality is very attractive. But it was not the same—not by any means."

"You force me to repeat that you take very great risks."

"No, no," she said plaintively. "How could I? I am not what you imagine me. But I must stay here and talk to you."

They talked until the night turned grey, drifting no more toward personalities. Then Clive looked at his watch.

"Do you know what time it is?"

"I do not in the least care."

"It is three o'clock. And I can see that you are tired. Come!"

She rose and he jerked her shawl across her chest and threw one end over her shoulder. "What a silly child you are to come

out with that bare neck. Aren't you chilled?"

She smiled up at him as gratefully as if unused to the tender care of man.

They went down the mountain without conversation; it was very dark and steep; a misstep might have sent one or both headlong.

The house was without lights; even the lanterns on the corridors had burned out. As they entered the court a man rose from a long chair, yawning and stretching himself. It was Charley Rollins.

"My God, Helena!" he exclaimed, "this is going too far. You know that all of us who know you swear by you, but you can't do this sort of thing with such women as Mrs. Volney and Harriet Lord in the house. Sitting up all night under a tree in full view of all Del Monte is one thing, but the middle of a forest, where you have never taken a man in the daytime before—

for heaven's sake, my dear child, have a care."

He ended rather feebly; for Helena had brought down her foot and thrown back her head with flashing eyes. "I shall do exactly what I choose to do," she cried. "And I hope Amy Volney and Harriet Lord have their heads out of their doors this minute. What business is it of yours, I should like to know? How dare you take me to task? Take Mr. Clive over to the dining-room, and give him some brandy, and then go home; or stay all night if you choose; there are two empty rooms at the corner. Good-night, Mr. Clive." And without taking further notice of Rollins she crossed over to the opposite corridor and disappeared.

CHAPTER VII.

CLIVE and Rollins exchanged few words on the drive home. Miss Belmont's name was not mentioned. Clive's feelings were mixed. He candidly admitted that his vanity was profoundly at peace with itself, and that Helena Belmont was the most interesting woman he had ever met. Nevertheless, his conscience chattered at his vanity like an angry monkey at a peacock.

"I feel exactly like a delinquent husband," he thought. "Premonitory, I suppose. I have an absurdly married feeling; the result of a long engagement, probably, and a lifelong acquaintance. . . . I wonder if a man ever bothers if the woman is not likely to find him out; I can't say it has ever worried me much before. I suppose it's on the

principle that what a woman doesn't know won't hurt her."

Then he wondered if he would have sat up all night with another woman had he been engaged to Helena Belmont.

He made his confession three days later, when Mary was fully recovered.

She smiled a little sadly, the smile which seems to belong to the lips of such women, fashioned to be good wives and mothers, and nothing more. She put up her hand and touched his hair shyly ; she seldom caressed him.

"She is always sitting up all night with some one or other. It seems to be a fad of hers. And you know I trust you absolutely." (He had the grace to blush.) "But, I think, if you don't mind, that I'll announce the engagement."

"Why of course I don't mind," he said, taken aback. "It was your idea to keep it quiet, not mine."

"Yes; but I think I'd like her to know."

As Clive left the cottage he met Rollins.

"I have something to tell you, old chap," he said awkwardly. "I want you to congratulate me. I am engaged to Miss Gordon."

"The devil you are!" exclaimed Rollins slapping him on the back, "I do congratulate you, old fellow, she's a jewel of a girl. Going to marry here?"

"Yes, in San Francisco."

"The club will give you a send-off the night before. You won't look as handsome on your wedding-morn as you otherwise might, and you'll have a dark brown taste in your mouth, but in a long period of domestic bliss you'll have a great joy to look back upon."

They walked down to the camp together, then Rollins left abruptly, and returning to Yorba went to the telephone office.

CHAPTER VIII.

HELENA BELMONT saw little of her company for two days. She spent part of the time in the forest, the rest in her boudoir, a long room at the east side of the house opening into her bedroom at one end and into a small library at the other. The bedroom was a pretty thing of pale pink and green, and white lace. The library, lined from floor to ceiling with books, many several generations old, had only a rug on the bare floor, a table and several upright chairs. The walls of the boudoir were panelled with the beautiful delicately-veined redwood the forest trees conceal under their forbidding bark. The ceiling was arched and heavily beamed. The curtains of doors and windows, the deep chairs and couches, the rugs on the dark floor were of Smyrna stuffs whose only

tangible color was a red that was almost black. A redwood mantel was built to the ceiling; a large table of the same wood, heavily carved, was covered with books and costly trifles. The deep window seats were also upholstered. The Castilian roses nodded against the pane, but Helena could look above the garden wall into the forest on the mountain.

And here Helena sat for hours. She was profoundly stirred and touching lightly the keys of something akin to happiness. Several times before in her life she had felt what she believed to be the quickening of love; but it had died in its swaddling clothes, and had been a vagary of the fancy to this. Her brain and her woman's instinct told her unerringly that she had found the man. Every part of her went out to him. A faint sweet something tipped her pulses. It is possible that passion was regnant at this time; that she was possessed by the savage primitive

desire of the first woman for the first man; so far she had come in contact with little beyond the man's powerful personality and responsive magnetism. Nevertheless there had been spiritual recognition, blind and groping as it may have been; certain torpid instincts stirred, and she divined vaguely what a woman might be to her husband. She had known many married women more or less intimately, been the confidant of more than one liaison; and with intuition fostered by such knowledge and her own strong brain, she rejoiced that she had met him in time, divining something of the bitter sadness which companions a woman, who, meeting a man too late, must be one thing to him, instead of twenty: his wife would still have the better part of his life, his higher nature, his duty, the supreme happiness of making his home.

She dreamed dreams of her future with Clive: the love and the art by which she

would hold him, the companionship. She forgot Mary Gordon's existence. Had she remembered, she would have imperiously dismissed the very thought of her. She had obtained what she wanted all her life, and recognized no obstacles.

She went up to the log by the creek and touched caressingly the tree against which he had leaned, gathered some of the ashes from his pipe and held them in the hollow of her hand. She smiled as she did so and wondered that clever women and silly women should be so little dissimilar when in love.

It was on the morning of the third day that the Chinese butler tapped at her door, and said—

"Mr. Lollins wantee you at telephone, missee."

"Oh, tell somebody else to answer him. I am tired of the very sound of that telephone. Some one is at it all day. I've a great mind to have it taken out."

"Allight, missee."

A few moments later he returned.

"Mr. Lollins slay he got something velly important tellee missee."

Helena went rapidly to the little room by the front door sacred to the telephone. The fear shook her that something had happened to Clive.

She sat down by the table and rang the bell.

"Halloo!" she said faintly.

"Halloo, Helena! is that you?" came Rollins' hearty, reassuring voice.

"Yes. What do you want? I wish you wouldn't bother me."

"Awfully sorry, but I've a piece of news for you—a corker."

"Well."

"It's about your Englishman."

"My Englishman? What Englishman? What nonsense are you talking?"

"Oh, come off. I've terrible news for

you. I've just congratulated him. He's mortgaged."

"I wish you would not talk slang over the telephone. I suppose you mean he's engaged to Mary Gordon."

"That's the hard cold fact."

"Well, please congratulate them for me. I'll give them a dinner. I'll write a note to-day——"

"You'll see them to-night. I hope you haven't forgotten that you are all to dine with us."

"I had forgotten it, but we'll be there."

"Great Scott, Helena! have you also forgotten that this is our last night, and that you asked six of us to spend a week with you? Are those boys still there?"

"They are; but I'll send them home this minute. I'm awfully sorry I forgot it, but everything will be ready for you. I'll send a wagon over for your traps this afternoon, and the char-à-banc will bring you back

to-night. Now, clear out, I have a great deal to attend to."

Helena replaced the trumpet carefully in its bracket, then leaned her elbows on the table and laughed. The one sensation of which she was definitely conscious for the moment was genuine amusement. She recalled her dreams, her picture life with Clive, and felt a fool; but she had always been able to laugh at herself, and she did so now. In a little while she went into the corridors where the guests were dawdling after their morning drive.

"*Mes enfants*," she said, blowing a kiss from the tips of her fingers to each of the young men in turn, "go straightway and pack up. You are to go home on the 4.10. I asked, a week ago, six of the club men to come here to-night, and you must vacate. And what do you think? My Englishman is engaged to Mary Gordon."

She ruffled her hair with a tragic little

gesture, threw up her hands and disappeared.

It was not long before the humor died out of her. In its wake came the profoundest depression she had ever known. She looked into a blank and colorless future, realizing that a woman may be young until fifty if it is still her privilege to seek and wait and hope, but that when her great joy has touched and passed her, she has buried all that is best of her youth.

She could not stay in her rooms, eloquent of imaginings, but went back to her guests, and clung to them and talked of what interested them, and had never been more hospitable and charming; all the while mechanically counting the years and months and days that lay ahead of her. The depression lasted for hours, during which she wondered if the weight in her brain was crushing the light and reason out of it.

And then the devil entered into her.

CHAPTER IX.

THE girls in their gayest muslin frocks, chaperoned by the more sedate Mrs. Cartwright, arrived at the camp at seven. A long table was spread under the redwoods near the bank of the little river, in whose falls bottles lay cooling. Clive was the only other guest. Mary Gordon had been asked; but although she had accepted with philosophy much that was Californian, the informalities of the Bohemian Club were more than she could stand. Clive had been begged to go alone and to stay as late as he liked.

Helena wore a pink muslin frock, her hair in a loose braid. Her eyes were dancing. She looked like a naughty child, and chattered clever nonsense, apparently in the in the highest of spirits.

An impromptu band played softly out of sight; one could hear the splashing of the river and the faint music of the redwoods. Chinese lanterns, suspended in a row over the table, and from the young redwoods, gave abundant light. It was a very informal dinner. The men wore flannel shirts, smoked when it pleased them, and assumed any attitude conducive to comfort. Clive tipped back his chair against a tree, and felt that it was his duty to rejoice that Mary was not present. Every man waited on himself and on the guests of honor. Helena, at the head of the table, had the one servant constantly at her elbow. It was her tendency to spoil the men she liked, and she encouraged her Bohemians in all their transgressions; which was one of the many reasons why they liked her better than any woman in California.

A course not pleasing her taste, she called for her guitar and sang for them a rollick-

ing song of the bull-fight. Clive leaned forward on the table and watched her: her nostrils expanded as if they had the scent of blood in them; she curled her lips under, clicking her teeth. Her eyes had not wandered to Clive since, upon entering the camp, she had prettily congratulated him.

"Helena, you alarm me," said Rollins mildly, when she finished. "I haven't seen you look as wicked as you do to-night for several years. You would give a stranger, Mr. Clive for instance, the impression that you were a cruel little demon, as you sing that song. Of course we know that only heaven in its infinite mercy lends you to us for a little."

"Oh, Mr. Clive!" said Helena in a weary tone, but with a suspicious alertness of eye, "I had such a funny experience with Mr. Clive, the other night. I think I'll have to tell it." She threw back her head and laughed infectiously: "Oh, it was so funny!"

Clive experienced an uncomfortable thrill. The others gave her immediate attention.

"Don't hesitate to tell us, Helena," said Rollins. "We will keep your confidence. And have mercy on our curiosity; that adjective is so vague."

Helena leaned forward, and clasping her hand about her chin, looked at the company with dancing eyes,

"Probably you all know," she said, "that not long since I spent five hours in the forest alone with Mr. Clive, talking in the midnight hour. Well, you don't know that Mr. Clive had previously told me that if he ever sat up all night with me he should kiss me, and several times; so when I took him to the loneliest spot I knew, the intimation was that I expected him to do justice to his principles, wasn't it?"

"It was, Helena," said Rollins, with an attempt at facetiousness, "and I hope he did. Served you right."

"Well, he did not! And I sat not three feet away from him for five hours, and never looked better. How do you suppose I bluffed him off?"

"Oh, come Helena!" said Rollins, who was beginning to feel sorry for Clive.

"You know," she continued, tossing her head and tapping her foot, much like a spirited race-horse, "I have always said I could do exactly as I pleased with a man, and I can. So it pleased me to play chess with an Englishman, whose only idea of the game is to jump over the board. Well, first I mildly remonstrated with him; then we argued the matter, quite coolly, for he smoked his pipe, and Englishmen are usually cool, you know. My powers of persuasion were not very effective. Then I told him that I was engaged. But as he was, too, he could not see the force of my remark. Well, you'd never guess in the wide world what I did then. I gently led him off on to the subject of

religion, and he preached until three o'clock, and forgot all about wanting to kiss me. Now, I call that sort of a man a duffer!" (with an affected drawl.) "What do you think about it?"

There was an intense and uncomfortable silence, Then Clive pushed back his chair abruptly. He walked straight up to Helena, lifted her from her seat, pinioned her arms, and kissed her while one could count thirty.

The men sprang to their feet. Their sympathies were with Clive, but she was their guest, and a woman; they would do whatever she commanded.

Clive dropped her into her chair, not too gently.

"Sit down, gentlemen," she said serenely; "we will now go on with the dinner."

CHAPTER X.

MR. VAN RHUYS returned the next morning. Helena and several of her guests drove over to the hotel station to meet him. The train was not due for some moments after their arrival. Helena sprang from the char-à-banc and ran up the hill to the Gordon cottage. Clive and Mary came out to meet her.

"I didn't want to write you a formal note of congratulation, Miss Gordon," she said, smiling charmingly. "I hoped to see you last night at the dinner. I am so sorry you were not there. It was a most interesting dinner."

"So Mr. Clive told me," said Mary innocently. "You are very kind, dear Miss Belmont."

"I want to give you a dinner. To-mor-

row? I must be quick. I hear my train. Do say yes."

"I am so sorry, thank you so much, but papa and I are going to San Francisco to-morrow afternoon. He has business, and my dressmaker wants me. After that we are going to pay three visits in San Mateo and Menlo Park; we hoped to get out of them, but it seems we can't, and papa thinks I'd better go."

"Oh!" said Helena. "What are you going to do with Mr. Clive?"

"That is the question. Of course he will be asked too, as soon as they know, but he hates the thought of it. He says he will stay in San Francisco, and run down and see me occasionally, but I hate to have him there at this time of the year, with those winds and fogs. I want him to stay here and be comfortable. It is such a rest for him after that long trip."

"Miss Gordon, you are beginning badly.

"SHE RAN DOWN THE HILL AS A MAN CAME FORWARD TO MEET HER."—*Page 113.*

You will spoil him. I should like to marry an Englishman just for the pleasure of bringing him up in the way he should he go. Suppose you leave him in my charge. I will take good care of him, and see that he does nothing but loaf." She turned to Clive, who was staring at her, his hands in his pockets, his lips together.

"Come over and stay at Casa Norte. You know all the men, and they will love to have you."

"Oh, do, Owin," said Mary. "They are always so jolly there, and I shall feel much easier about you." "Very well," said Clive, "I will go. Thank you."

"I'll send over for you in time for dinner. Will that be right? Oh, my train! my train. What will Mr. Van Rhuys think of me? Good-bye, Miss Gordon. *Hasta leugo*, Mr. Clive."

She ran down the hill as a man came forward to meet her. He was a big well-made

man with the walk and carriage, the perfect adjustment of clothes which distinguish the fashionable New Yorker. His Dutch ancestry showed vaguely in his face, which was fair and large, and roughly modelled; but the clever pleasant eyes were American; the deep lines about them betrayed an experience of life which reclaimed the face from any tendency to the commonplace. He looked the rather *blasé* man of forty, yet full of vitality and good-nature, and possessed of all the brains he would ever need.

His eyes deepened as he took Helena's hand.

"How jolly well you look," he said, with the slight affectation of accent peculiar to the smart New Yorker. "I'm awfully glad to see you again, awfully."

As the char-à-banc drove off, the girls leaned out and waved their hands to Miss Gordon and Clive, and Van Rhuys was told of the engagement.

"Good-looking chap," he said.

"Isn't he?" said Helena enthusiastically. "I sat out all night with him, just for the pleasure of looking at him."

Van Rhuys frowned and turned away. He had wished more than once that Helena Belmont, doubly fascinating as her unconventionality made her, had been brought up in New York. He had had more than one spasm of premonitory horror, but had reminded himself that none knew better than she how to be *grande dame* if she chose.

When they reached the house he went to his room to clean up, then sought Helena in her boudoir. She was leaning over the back of a chair, tipping it nervously.

"I want to say something right away," she said, as he closed the door. "I want you to release me—I cannot marry you."

Van Rhuys pressed his lips together and half closed his eyes. But he merely asked, "What is the reason?"

"I am going to marry Mr. Clive."

"You are going to do what?" Van Rhuys' eyes opened very wide. He understood Helena little, and one of her enduring charms was her quality of the unexpected. "Are you speaking of the man who is engaged to Miss Gordon?"

"Yes, that is the man. I am not joking."

"You mean that you are going to try to cut that poor girl out?"

"I mean that I shall," said Helena passionately. "He is the only man that I have ever really wanted, and I intend to have him."

"It's a damned dishonorable thing to do."

"I don't care. Honor's nothing but an arbitrary thing, anyhow. I'll have what I want. It wasn't necessary for me to tell you this, but it does me good to say it to somebody."

"And you don't care whether I am hurt or not—nor that poor girl?"

"Oh, I don't believe I do. I wish I did. I feel so wicked—but I can't. I can't care for anything else. You didn't love me very much, anyhow. You are merely in love with me."

"You never gave me the chance. I have barely kissed you. I had hoped that after a while, after we were married, it might be different. You have fully made up your mind?"

"All the mind I've got is in it."

"Then I don't see that there's anything for me to do, but go. I can't hang round here. I'll have a sudden telegram calling me to New York. Will you shake hands?"

She came forward and gave him her hand. "Have I been unfair?" she asked, smiling. "I didn't have time to write, and at least I didn't break it off by telephone, as I did with one of them."

"You have behaved with the utmost consideration," said Van Rhuys dryly. He

looked at her a moment. "Suppose you fail?" he asked.

"Fail?" she said haughtily. "I never fail. There's nothing I'll stop at—nothing! nothing! I always get what I want. I was born that way."

"I know; but there is a pretty tough sort of fibre in some Englishmen, and they call it honor. Well, good luck to you. And good-bye; I shall go on the 4.10."

CHAPTER XI.

CLIVE drove over the next afternoon. He sat some distance from Helena at dinner, and afterward she and Mrs. Lent played billiards with himself and one of the other men for an hour; the rest of the evening was passed in the large living-room, where Clive listened to better amateur music than he had ever heard before. Some little time after the women had retired, a Chinese servant entered the dining-room, where the men were drinking brandy-and-soda, and said to Clive—

"Missee Hellee wantee slee you in bludoir."

"What?" asked Clive stupidly.

"Her gracious Majesty is pleased to signify that she will give you audience in her boudoir," said Rollins, who stood beside him.

"But I can't go to her room at this hour, It's one o'clock."

"That is her affair. Besides, no one else need know. Follow the Mongolian. If you don't it's like her to come here and order you to go."

The Chinaman left Clive at the door of the boudoir. The room was empty and dimly lit. The air was heavy with the scent of the roses beyond the window. Clive looked up into the forest. The aisles were too black for shadows, although the huge trunks were defined. The mysterious arbors above sang gently.

Helena came out of her bedroom presently, closing the door behind her.

Clive went to meet her. "Am I to apologize?" he asked. "I shan't mean it if I do. What you did was abominable."

"Don't scold me. I never thought I'd do such a thing. I don't know what possessed me."

"The devil, I should say. But I hope I'll never see you in that mood again. You were at your unloveliest. You came near to being vulgar."

"I was quite vulgar and you know it. Don't let us say any more about it. Sit down here in the window."

The window-seat was broad and deep and heavily cushioned. They made themselves very comfortable.

"You can light your pipe. I am glad you came—very glad."

"I ought not to be here at all. I was an ungrateful wretch in the first place not to go where I ought to be now, and a weaker one to come here."

Helena leaned her elbow on the low grating and looked up at him. There was neither childishness nor coquetry in her eyes.

"But I am glad." She paused a moment. "I have sent away Mr. Van Rhuys."

"Mr. Van Rhuys has had a happy escape

—and I am not necessarily uncomplimentary to you."

"Why didn't you tell me of your engagement to Mary Gordon the other night?"

"Partly because she asked me not to, partly because I didn't think it would interest you."

"You are very modest."

"Would it have interested you?"

"It does—immensely. What an irrepressible flirt you are!"

"Do you expect me to sit up at midnight with a pretty woman, and not flirt with her? Why else did you send for me to come here?"

"You are engaged to another woman."

"You expect no man to remember his obligations when he is with you," He laid down his pipe suddenly.

"Give me these two weeks," he said; "I shall never meet a woman like you again. If you will forget what the end must be, I will."

"Why is it that Englishmen are always

marrying that type of woman—and always forgetting their obligations?"

"Because it is the best type of woman alive and the hope of the race. Man is both the victim of his race and of his sex. Woman is only the victim of man—which simplifies the question for her."

"Do you love Mary Gordon?"

"Yes—very much indeed."

"Shall you always love her?"

"I think so—more and more. A good woman becomes a great deal to a man. She may lack the two things that enthrall man most, passion and intellect; but she shares his burdens and his sorrows; she never fails him in poverty or in trouble; her sympathy is as ready for the small harrowings of life as for its disasters. She satisfies the domestic instinct which is in every man—symbolizes home to him. She bears his children and gives him unfailing submission and help." Helena pressed her fan

against her lips. Something stabbed through her.

"A clever woman could give you all that —and more," she said, after a moment.

"No; she might think she could, in the first enthusiasm of love. But she would not, for the reason that she would exact as much in return; and a man has so little time."

"And is that your idea of happiness?" He hesitated a moment. "It would be hard to find a better. There are plenty of clever and attractive women a man can always meet."

"That is not what I asked you. You answered for the race, not for yourself. Are you afraid of being disloyal to Mary Gordon? Well, these two weeks are to be mine, not hers. If you will not be frank with me how are we to know each other? And I will keep your confidences. Tell me—is that your idea of happiness?"

"No," he said. "It is not."

"Why did you ask her to marry you—seeing things as clearly as you do? There is not the same excuse for you as for many men."

"Four years ago I had thought less. And propinquity is a strong factor."

"What shall you do when you meet the one woman?"

"I don't know. No man knows beforehand what he will do in any circumstance. Perhaps I should behave like a scoundrel and cut. Perhaps I should find strength somewhere."

"What is the use of strength? What do all those ideals amount to, anyhow? I have often had the most exalted longings, a desire for something better and higher, I hardly know what. And I have always asked—To what end? *Cui bono?*"

"That is because you believe that the mystery of your nature means nothing; that

the blind striving of millions of beings for spiritual things, which is formulated under the general name of religion, means nothing. The lower the plane you live on now, the longer will be your climb hereafter."

"Does Mary Gordon share your convictions?"

"I have never spoken of them to her."

"Shall you?"

"Most likely."

"And she will believe whatever you tell her to believe?"

"I think I can carry her with me."

"And that will be another bond?"

"Yes."

"You are an extraordinary man, and we do have the most remarkable midnight conversations."

"I am ready to talk of other things. Are you going to give me these two weeks?"

"Yes."

"Are you going to behave yourself, or

are you going to treat me to another performance like that of last night?"

"Oh—never! I hope I shall never feel that way again. Papa used to encourage me when I got on my high horse, and I always let myself go. But I became ashamed of myself for being so undignified, some years ago. I can't think why I—yes I can, of course, and you know why just as well as I do."

"Give me your hand."

She gave it to him, and he bent over her. She had no thought of failure, but she shrank away.

"Wait," she said.

"For what? You have dismissed Van Rhuys, and we have only two weeks."

"Is it necessary that I should kiss you?"

"Do you think it would be fair to me if you did not? Do you expect me to wander all day in that forest and sit up all night with you without kissing you? What do

you think I am made of? I might with a woman who was intellectual and nothing more, but not with you."

She slipped away from him and stood up, drawing her hands over her eyes.

"I cannot understand myself," she said. "I have let eight men kiss me and thought little about it, but I cannot kiss you whom I would rather than any man I have ever known. Won't you go away now?"

He got up at once.

"I don't know what there is about you," he said. "I never knew another woman whom I would have obeyed for a moment in the same conditions. Good-night."

CHAPTER XII.

HE did not see her alone again for two days, although he was with her constantly, and they had long talks apart. There were seven clever men at Casa Norte this time; all of the women were bright, or more, and the days and nights were very gay. They rode and drove and sailed and picnicked, and sang and played tennis and told stories, and there was much good conversation. Clive wrote a brief note daily to Mary Gordon, but gave up his thoughts recklessly to Helena Belmont. She showed to full advantage as hostess: thoughtful, suggestive, womanly, unselfish. Her mind, as revealed in their long conversations, captivated him. Her grace appealed more keenly to his senses than her beauty,

which sometimes, as she talked, wholly disappeared, broken by a personality so strong and so variable as to play havoc with its harmonies.

On the third morning he met her in the pink-and-green wilderness of the rose-garden. The dew glittered on every leaf and petal, for the sun was hardly over the mountain. The guests had been ordered early to bed the night before, that they might rise early and go on a picnic in a distant part of the forest. Rollins was buttoning his shirt before an open window and singing a duet with Mrs. Tower, who had her head out of another window. Helena wore a pink-and-white organdie frock and a large hat lined with pink. She was gathering a cluster of roses for her belt. As Clive joined her she plucked a bud and pinned it on his cheviot shirt: he wore no coat; the men only dressed for dinner.

Clive's broad shoulders were between the

house and Helena. He pressed his hand suddenly over hers, flattening the bud.

"You've stuck me," she said, pouting. "These roses are full of thorns."

"I think I'd better go."

She gave him a glance of mingled alarm, anger and appeal.

"You will not go!"

She turned her hand about and clasped it over his.

"What is the use? I'm afraid I'm getting in too deep. What common sense I have left tells me to get out while there is time."

She tightened her clasp. "But you won't go?" she said imperiously.

"No, I shall not go. If I did, I shouldn't stay."

Helena threw back her head, her woman's keen delight in power over man as strong for the moment as her gladness in Clive's touch and presence.

After breakfast Miss Belmont and her

guests drove for two hours through the forest, scarcely seeing the sun, then camped in a cañon by a running stream. The cañon was narrow at the bottom but widened above, and seemed to have gathered all the sunshine of the day. Its sides were a tangle of fragrant chaparral, wild roses, purple lilac, and red lily, the delicate green of young trees, the metallic green and red of the madroño. On high were the stark redwoods.

Some of the men went frankly to sleep after luncheon. The others and several of the girls fished ardently.

"Come," said Helena to Clive. "There is a trail over there, and I want to see what is on top."

"It will be a hard pull."

"Don't you want to come? Very well, I'll go alone. Hang my hat on that tree."

She sprang lightly from stone to stone across the stream.

He followed her up the steep side of the

cañon, through brush so dense that they were quickly out of sight, and through a bewildering fragrance. At the top they were in the dark forest again, and pushed along as best they could. They found themselves among the straggling outposts of an underforest of fronds. A few redwoods spread their spiked arms above it, but the sun touched many a rustling fan. The heights beyond lifted away irregularly, in steeps and galleries and higher levels, a gracious blue mist softening the austerity of the crowding trees. A creek roared softly above the low rhythmic murmur of the forest. Even these slight sounds seemed to intrude on the great primeval silence.

"What is it?" asked Helena, "the peculiar influence of these redwood forests? I have been in other forests in many parts of the world, and I have never known anything like this. It lifts one up, makes one feel capable of anything, and yet gives one a

terrible longing and loneliness—when one is alone."

"It is partly spiritual, partly sensual. The forest seems to hold in essence the two principles of the universe. Do you want to go in among these ferns? They are pretty thick, but I can hold them back for you."

"Yes, I want to see what is in there."

They pushed in among the fronds, which grew taller as they penetrated. Soon Clive had no need to hold the leaves apart for his companion; they spread out a foot and more above their heads. The place, a young forest of slender columns, was filled with green light. Small feathery ferns nodded in a little breeze. The creek seemed to murmur above them. Clive turned and looked at Helena. Her face was glorified. He took her in his arms and kissed her. She did not shrink from him, and they clung together.

After a few moments she moved her head

back and looked up at him. His eyes were not laughing.

"There is something I want to say," she said. "A woman doesn't usually say it until she is asked. I love you. I want you to know that I couldn't kiss you like that if I did not."

"I believe that you love me," he said.

"Did you guess the reason I did not kiss you the other night? I had intended to, but it suddenly came to me that you did not love me enough, that you were merely in love with me; and I could not give myself like that. I intended to wait longer than this. But I forgot." She hesitated a moment—the color left her face. "Do you love me?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, "I love you."

She went back to his arms, but even while she learned the lesson that some women learn once only, and then possessingly and finally, she realized that she had not the

courage to speak of Mary Gordon. She had intended, the moment she was sure of him, to command him to break his engagement at once; but her arrogant will found itself supple before the strong fibre of the man, and shrank from the encounter. They walked on after a time, until they came to a stone, where they sat down. She put her hands about his face. The motion was a little awkward, but she was a woman who would grow very lavish with caresses.

"Why do you look so serious?" she asked. "You looked so different a moment ago."

"The situation is serious," he said briefly, "But don't let us talk about it; we have twelve more days."

She threw her head back against his shoulder and looked up into the feathery roof. A ray of light wandered in and touched her face. "I am so happy," she said, "I don't care what to-morrow brings. I have thought

and thought of being with you like this and now I am and it is enough. I ought to be serious—I know what you are thinking of—but it doesn't matter; nothing but this matters. I never took life seriously—except in a sort of abstract mental way occasionally—until a week ago, and I doubt if I could keep it up."

"You could keep it up. You don't know yourself."

"Once I got dreadfully bored and took care of a sick poor woman who lived in a cabin near a place where I was staying. Her husband was away in the mines, and she had no one to look after her but neighbors as poor as herself. I sat up with her and worked over her as if she were my sister. I was frightfully interested, and so proud of myself. Then one morning—I think it was the fifth—I was sitting by the window about four o'clock, looking at the view, which was beautiful—a rolling country covered with

closely trimmed grape-vines, and miles and miles beyond, a range of the blue mountains. It was so quiet. Eternity must be like that quiet of four in the morning. And gradually as I looked, the most sickening disgust crept over me for the life I had led the past four days, an utter collapse of my philanthropy. I wanted to go away and be frivolous. I was hideously bored. I hated the sick woman, her poverty, and everything serious in life. I stole away and sent back a servant to stop until I could get a trained nurse. I never went near the woman again."

He pressed her to him with passionate sympathy. "Poor child," he said, "you have lived only in the shallows. I wish you always might."

But she was too happy to heed anything but the strength of his embrace.

"You don't know yourself," he said, "not the least little bit."

"I know a lot more than you think, and I know how I can love you."

"You hardly know that. You have merely a vague far-away notion. All your woman's lore is borrowed, and you are only half awake. Your mind, your mental conception of things, has outrun everything else. If the other part ever caught up you would be a wonderful woman." Something in his tone made her take her will between her teeth.

"You will teach me," she said imperiously, "as long as we are both alive."

"Yes, if I am a scoundrel. But don't let us talk about that now, please. I will be happy, too. Come, let us get out of this. It is damp and we will get rheumatism, which is not romantic. Let us go home and sit in your boudoir. I feel as if I should like to be surrounded by the conventionalities of life for a time. One feels too primitive in this forest."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE next morning she awoke with a sudden pang of sympathy for Mary Gordon. Her intuitions were keener than they had ever been. She turned restlessly, then sprang out of bed and rang for her maid.

She went out into the garden and gathered a basket of roses for the breakfast-table. As she entered the court, the dew on her hair, her damp frock clinging to her bust and arms, Clive was standing by the fountain, and alone. His eyes had been dull, but the light sprang to them as he went forward to meet her. He half held out his arms. She dropped the basket into them with a little laugh.

"Come into the dining-room," she said, "and help me arrange them."

The water was ready in the silver and crystal bowls. She disposed the roses with a few practised touches, then turned and flung her arms about Clive and kissed him.

"What is the matter," she asked. Didn't you sleep?"

"No; not much."

"You said you would not think. Not for twelve days."

"I shall try not to."

"You must sleep after breakfast. I'll have your room darkened and all the horrid flies put out, and Faun will stand outside your door and see that no one passes."

"What a dear little wife you would make."

"Do you think I would make a good wife?" she asked anxiously. "That you could do anything with all this raw material?"

"I think you would make the most perfect wife in the world," he said.

Helena made no secret of her love for Clive. Even if she had been less sure of

success, she would have gloried in doing him honor. But, although she did not doubt the issue, she had respect enough for him to scent a battle ahead, and the savage in her was ardent for the fight.

The household was profoundly interested. Helena, despite her love of power, had never been known before to deliberately woo a man from another woman. They knew that she must be mastered by a passion new to her, to ignore a girl whom she liked and respected as she did Mary Gordon. Even the women believed she would win; only Rollins doubted.

"I don't know," he said to Mrs. Lent; "he's broad-gauge, that man. He's so infatuated now that he doesn't know where he's at. But he'll wake up, and then I don't know that even Helena Belmont will be able to manage him. A man hates to go back on a girl, anyhow; he doesn't exactly know how to do it."

"Well, I wish he'd hurry and make up his mind," said Mrs. Lent, "for he looks like a funeral. He flirted with even poor little me when he first came, but I haven't seen that delightfully wicked expression in his eyes for a week."

CHAPTER XIV.

CLIVE would not sit up all night with Helena, but they spent hours of the day in the forest, and there was nothing funereal in his aspect when they were alone. One morning Helena's maid brought her a note when she came to awaken her.

"My dear Miss Belmont" (it ran),—"I am going away for a few days. I shall be back on Monday, at four.

"Yours truly,

"OWIN CLIVE."

Helena stared at the abrupt, formal missive in dismay for a moment; then laughed. She had seen men struggle in her net before. She knew that he would keep his word and return, and had perfect faith in the power

of her seductive charm, no matter what good resolve he might accomplish when away.

It was a hot day, and her guests were too indolent to do anything but lie about and smoke and read. They did not want to be entertained, and she let them alone and spent the day in the rose-garden in the shade of the oaks. She rather enjoyed thinking of Clive, for variety, and anticipating his return. She concocted clever arguments and convincing appeals. She saw herself in the gowns she would wear when he was with her again, and was glad for the wealth that gave such potent aid to her beauty. She was very happy: the future was so exquisite that she trembled and grew breathless at the thought of it.

The next day she sat on a ledge below the crest of the cliffs, and stared at the huge restless waves of the Pacific rearing against the outlying rocks, falling with their baffled roar. There was neither peace, nor reason,

nor power of anticipation in her. She was insensible of any instinct beyond an insufferable desire for his physical presence.

That night she went to bed glad with the thought that she should see him in sixteen hours, and pictured their meeting so often and variously, and struck a match to look at the clock so many times, that she slept little. The next morning she was so nervous and apprehensive that the placid conversation of her guests was intolerable, and she would not drive with them. After luncheon she went up to a favorite spot in the forest, directing one of the Chinese servants to conduct Clive to her when he returned.

As the afternoon wore on her gloom lifted and passed. She grew light-minded and humorous, almost indifferent. She took herself to task in some dismay: in the fitness of things she should be passionately serious when he arrived. "Are there really no great crises in life?" she thought. "Are

we all comedians gone wrong, personified jokes?" But she was helpless; the reaction was inevitable.

Clive was late. He was always late. Helena felt no uneasiness, but sat idly, wondering how they would meet, her mind occasionally drifting to other things. She had carried a large hat lined with white and covered with white plumes, in a box through the damaging brush, and hidden the box in a hollow redwood. The hat, pushed backward on her brilliant hair enhanced the oval colorous beauty of her face. She took it off suddenly and threw it on the ground; the attempt was too evident; all men were not consistently dense.

She heard a crackling in the brush on the other side of the creek, then the Chinaman's protesting voice.

"Can't hully when catchee pigtail allee time, Mister Clive. Me got thlee velly bad sclatches, and clothes allee same no washee."

There was no answer from Clive, but he was in view presently, The Chinaman retreated hastily, wrapping his pigtail round his neck. Helena rose and went forward.

She felt suddenly resentful and haughty.

After all, it was presumption in a man to take upon himself the deciding of a question which was as vital to her as to him. She wondered if she really did love him; certainly she felt neither tenderness nor tolerance at the moment.

Clive walked slowly across the felled redwood which served as bridge between the high banks of the creek. As he approached Helena forgot herself and her moods.

"He has suffered horribly," she thought. "What am I that I did not know he must?"

And then she realized that she could not comprehend his experience of the past three days; that her mind merely grasped the fact: she had no profounder, more simpa-

thetic understanding. She drew back, frightened and chilled.

"I am sorry to see you looking so badly," she said coldly, as they shook hands. "Perhaps we had better have it out at once."

They sat down against two redwoods, facing each other.

"Very well," said Clive, "I have been a scoundrel and nothing I can say is the least excuse. I can only state the facts. . . . The average girl who is an avowed flirt expects to be made love to, and a man finds it no task to do what a charming woman exacts of him. . . .I took you in the beginning for a spoiled beauty, a coquette, above the average as far as brain was concerned, but still suggesting little more than an unusually spirited flirtation. Of course, I was far more fascinated than I realized, or I should not have come to your house, nor should I have asked you to give me these two weeks. . . .That it might mean life or

death to either of us I did not realize until that day among the ferns."

The fight was on. Helena threw back her head. "Can you not explain to Mary Gordon? Surely she would release you."

"I never could explain to Mary Gordon. She would comprehend that after four years I had thrown her over for a prettier woman whom I had known two weeks. Women like that—simple, good, loyal women—don't reason and analyze as a clever woman does. And the hurt lasts—not because the man is worth it, any more than any man is good enough for such women—but because they are what they are."

"But she was not the woman for you; therefore she would find another man."

"She would live on an isolated ranch in Southern California for several years, then go back to England and live in her old home, among the people she has known all her life. Those women don't seek distraction. They

are the slaves of an idea. If the right man did come, she wouldn't know it."

"All of which means that you think it your duty to marry her."

"I mean to marry her. There is nothing else to be done. If there were no other reason I have no right to make her ridiculous."

Helena caught her breath. For the first time she mentally appreciated the strength in the man which had captivated her woman's instincts. But she did not lose courage.

"And I am not to be considered at all? I say nothing about being made ridiculous. If I am it is my own fault, and I don't care, anyhow; that seems to me a very insignificant matter. Now that I have found you am I to be left alone—thirty, forty years? You know that I have about equal possibilities of good and bad in me. If I married you I could become as wholly good as any mortal can. I never realized what possibili-

ties there are in any of us as I did in the last few days before you went away. The principal reason that I love you is because I always feel that there is something in you to climb to and that you could lift me up to you. If you leave me I'll become a bad woman. Why not? It must be very interesting, and I have nothing more in life to look forward to. If I lived with you I might grow into your belief; you could carry me anywhere; but alone I cannot. Moreover, I want to live in this life. I cannot sit down and wait patiently for a mythical and unsubstantial hereafter. I am too much of a savage, I suppose, but at all events, I can't."

"There will be no excuse for you to become a bad woman. You have too much brain and money—too many methods of distraction. You can travel and make any life you choose. The world is an interesting place; you don't know the A B C of it."

"You are cruel."

"Yes," he said. "More so than you realize just now."

"I'm not doubting that you love me. If I did, do you suppose I would argue with you? I'm not in a tender or sympathetic mood. There is too much to be said. I *must* talk it out now; we are not an ordinary pair of fools." She paused a moment and looked straight at him. "We have a more imperative duty to ourselves than to traditions. You are in the new world now, almost in a new civilization. Smash such outworn ideals. They are nothing, nothing to human happiness."

"Such traditions as honor and faith and pity for the weaker are in the bone and blood of the older civilization. If we tore them out there is not much we've got, that's worth anything, that wouldn't follow."

"I would not care—not a straw. I should love you whether you were satisfied with yourself or not, and I could make you forget."

"No ; you could not."

"Oh, you are way above me," she said bitterly. "I don't mean to say that I haven't known plenty of honorable men, but they would find a way out of it—for me. You seem to be welded together so compactly that every characteristic is bound up with every other. Nothing is acquired, separate. Probably I'd never reach you, after all. Perhaps it is as well we don't marry——"

"I wish you would not talk as if I were an infernal prig. Can't you imagine what an ass a man feels when a woman rots to him like that? I am the most ordinary person you will probably ever know. If I were not we wouldn't be where we are to-day. Now that I have made such a mess of things I can only see one way out of it, and I don't feel a hero, I assure you."

"Have you thought of yourself at all during the last three days?"

"Of course I've thought of myself. What

a question! And thinking of myself meant thinking of you."

"But you have thought more of Mary Gordon—I mean you have considered her more,"

"Yes; I have."

She got up and went over and sat down on the edge of the bluff. He filled his pipe. She smiled as the smoke drifted to her. She thought that she had never seen the creek look so beautiful. The stones under the clear water shone like opaque jewels. Great bunches of feathery maidenhair clung to every boulder. The long delicate strands of the ice-grass trailed far over the water. Tiny trees sprouted from rocks in mid-stream, where moss had gathered. Red lilies and ferns grew close to the brink. The ugly brown roots of a pine clung, squirming, down the bluff.

On the mountain above the plateau a deer leaped once, crashing through the

brush, tossing his white horns in terror at sight of man. A squirrel chattered high up in a redwood, where he was packing acorns for the winter. A school of salmon swam serenely down the creek and disappeared in the dark perspective.

Helena sat there for a half-hour. Then she went back to Clive, but did not sit down. He rose also.

"I understand you a little better, I think," she said. "You won't like what I am going to say, but I shall say it, anyhow. You have so much good in you. I never thought I should love a good man, but I believe that is really the reason I love you so much. The raw material in me responds to the highly developed in you. You are capable of so much that is way beyond me. I have fine impulses, but they are shallow; lofty ideals, but in a little while they bore me. And you are consistent. Even when you do what you know to be wrong, you

never vary in your ideals and faith. I am new and crude and heterogeneous. It is the difference between the Old and the New."

"You have the richest possibilities of any woman I have ever known——"

"Tell me something. Is it not because Mary Gordon is the more helpless and appeals more to your chivalry?—although you love me more: although I have more beauty and brains and passion, and could make you far happier?"

"That is one reason."

"Then will the manliest and best of men continue to be captured by the best and simplest of women? It will produce a better race, I suppose. If I had been your mother you would not be half what you are. It is enough for the man to have the brain, I suppose. We are a forced growth and abnormal—but what is to become of us?"

His reserve left him then and he caught her in his arms. She clung to him desper-

ately, and for a while forgot that the victory was still to be won. Then she cried and coaxed, and pleaded, and lavished endearment, and was far more difficult for the man to combat than when he had stood his ground with a brain alone.

"Come," he said finally; "can't you understand? You might help me a little. Can't you see that I want to let everything go and stay with you? Don't you think I know what I should find with you? You do know that? Well, then, you should also know that I have made up my mind to do the only decent thing a man could do."

"Well, give me a month longer. Let me have that much, at least."

"I shall go to-morrow. If I go now all these people will quickly forget me, and regard what has passed between us as one of your flirtations. But if I stayed on I should make you ridiculous, and perhaps compromise you—you are so reckless. And

for other reasons the sooner I get away from here the better."

"What are the other reasons?"

"We've discussed the subject enough. Come, let us go."

"I never knew that a man could be so obstinate with a beautiful woman he loved."

"You have a woman's general knowledge of men, but you know nothing of any type you haven't encountered. I believe you could make any man love you; but certain men are greater cowards before certain inherited principles than they are before the prospect of parting from the woman they most love——"

"I said that you were the victim of traditions."

"Perhaps I am, but I am also unable to eat raw fish or human flesh. What are any of us but the logical results of traditions? Just look at this fog. Let me put your shawl round you."

Helena turned. A fine white mist was pouring out of the forest on the other side of the creek. It had passed them, and was puffing slowly onward. It lay softly on the creek, covering the bright water. It swirled about the trees and moved lightly through the dark arbors above. It fled up the mountain beyond, and the forest showed through the silver veil like grey columns with capitals and bases of frozen spray.

"Yes, we must go," said Helena, "or we shall be lost."

CHAPTER XV.

HELENA did not meet her guests at dinner that night, nor did she trouble to send word that she was ill. She rang for the Chinese butler, gave him an order, then locked her doors and sat motionless in her boudoir for hours. She pictured, until her brain ached, and her ears rang, what her life with Clive could have been, and what his would be with Mary Gordon.

But despair was not in her as yet, for he was still under the same roof, and she had not played her last card. It was a card that she had half-consciously considered from the beginning, and during the last few days had looked full upon. To-night for the first time she realized that it was a hateful card, unworthy of her, but reminded herself that

she was a woman who would, if necessary, walk straight to her purpose over cracking and spouting earth.

At twelve o'clock she sat before her dressing table regarding herself attentively in the mirror. She wore a negligé of white crêpe and lace, which half revealed her neck and bust. Her unbound hair clung to her body like melted copper, which had just begun to stiffen into rings, and waves, and spirals. She had never looked more beautiful.

There was a knock at her door.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Allee gentlemens go to bled," announced Ah Sing cautiously.

"Very well."

She rose hurriedly, almost overturning her chair. Her hands shook. She caught sight of a terrified face in the mirror.

"This won't do!" she thought angrily. She rang. Ah Sing returned.

"Bring me a glass of champagne," she said.

"Allight."

She closed the door upon him, then opened it quickly. "Ah Sing!" she called.

The Chinaman returned.

"Light a lamp in the drawing-room and ask Mr. Clive to go there."

"Allight."

She stood leaning against the door, her hand pressed hard against her chin, her eyes staring angrily at her reflection in a long Psyche mirror.

Ah Sing tapped and handed in the champagne. She pushed it aside with a gesture of disgust.

"Take it away. Did you do as I told you?"

"Yes, missee, Mr. Clive in dlawing-loom now."

He went out and still Helena stared at herself in the mirror with angry terrified

eyes. After all, she was but a girl, with a woman's theories. What she was determined upon had seemed very easy and picturesque at long range. She had even rehearsed it mentally during the past two days; but now that she was to enact the *rôle* it appalled her. She recalled several scenes of the sort as presented by the makers of fiction (the canny and imaginative Frenchman for the most part), but failed to find spiritual stamina, in the retrospect.

"What a fool! What a fool!" she thought. "I, who have prided myself that I have a will of iron. If his first duty is to me he will stay, and two people will be happy instead of miserable. As for Mary Gordon, she will marry the curate inside of five years."

She retreated suddenly to her wardrobe, and wrapped a broad scarf about her shoulders and bust, then brought her foot down and went resolutely out into the corridor.

"HE WAS STANDING BY THE MANTEL."—*Page 165.*

The fog was banked in the court. The palms looked like the dissolving eidola of themselves. The invisible fountain splashed heavily, as if oppressed.

"I needed the shawl after all," she thought grimly. "A sneeze might be fatal."

She walked rapidly down the corridor to the drawing-room, and without giving herself an instant for vacillation, turned the knob and went in. Then she cowered against the door and would have exchanged every hope she possessed for the privilege of retreat. But Clive had seen her.

He was standing by the mantel. He looked his best, as he always did in evening dress. Even as Helena wondered if the earth were quaking beneath Casa Norte, she was conscious of his remarkable physical beauty. He had his pipe in his hand. It dropped suddenly to the mantelshelf. But he did not go forward to meet her.

"There is something I want to say," she

gasped, searching wildly for inspiration. "It has occurred to me that perhaps the reason you hesitated was my money. I will give it all away—to charity or my aunt. I will only keep a little, so as not to be a burden to you. You may think this a silly Quixotic idea—made on the impulse of the moment—but indeed I would."

"I am sure that you would. I had not thought of the money. I did not get that far."

Helena pressed her hands against the door behind her. She felt an impulse to laugh hysterically. For the life of her she could not remember a detail that she had rehearsed. She felt as if on the edge of a farce-comedy. But she would not give up the game.

"I am so tired," she said plaintively. "I have eaten nothing since I saw you, and I have thought and thought and thought until I am all worn out."

He placed a chair at once.

"You poor little thing," he said. "Let me go to the larder and see if I can't find you something——"

"No ; I don't want anything."

She sat down, holding the shawl closely about her. Clive returned to the mantel.

"My head ached so I had to take my hair down," she said.

"I wonder what is going on in your head at the present moment."

"Don't you know ?"

"No. Why are you such a reckless child ? You could have seen me in the morning."

"I came here to make it impossible for you to marry Mary Gordon. I can't do it, and I feel like a fool."

He turned away his head.

"I told you before that the *rôle* of Delilah did not suit you. And if it did, couldn't you see that I had made up my mind ? What sort of a weakling——"

"You didn't let me finish," she interrupted him, blushing furiously. "I meant—of course I meant—that I want you to leave with me for Europe to-morrow—we can marry in San Francisco—I must look like a Delilah! Why do the novelists and dramatists arrange these matters so much better than we do?—Oh, what an idiot I am, anyhow!"

"Go back to your room—please do."

"You won't marry me to-morrow, then?—good heavens! that I should propose to a man!"

He made no reply.

"I don't believe you love me a bit."

"Of course you don't. A woman never gives a man credit for any decency of motive: her theory is that he follows along the line of least resistance. Well, I suppose he does."

She dropped her face into her hands.

"Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?" she said passionately.

Clive brought his hand close above his own eyes. "Will it not help you to know that I love you unalterably?"

"Can a man remember a woman like that?"

"There is one woman in every man's life that he never forgets; and that woman, worse luck, is rarely his wife."

"It would mean everything to me. And I could be true to you. But it doesn't satisfy me." She dropped her hands and stared at him. "I want you—*you*. How am I to drag out my life? I can't believe that after to-night I shall never see you again. I can't! I can't!" She stood up and leaned against the opposite end of the mantel. "Do you know one thing that keeps on hurting me through everything?" she asked after a few moments. "It is that you suffer more than I do, than I am capable of suffering, and that I cannot sympathize with you as I want to do. Is that the reason that you don't love

me well enough to give up everything else for me—that I am not strong enough to hold you?"

"Of course it is not the reason. If you really love me—and I believe you do—you will suffer enough before you get through."

For a while neither spoke again, nor moved. The ocean sounded as if it were under the window.

"There is another thing," she said, finally. "I may as well say it. I know that if I had succeeded to-night I should have been horribly disappointed in you. It wouldn't be you any longer. For what I love in you is your strength—a strength I don't possess. I'm glad I came to-night, although I've made myself ridiculous; I know both you and myself better. I can be true to you now; I don't think I could have been before, and I might have done reckless things. And perhaps after you have gone and the novelty and excitement have worn off, I shall under-

stand you still better. That is what I shall live for. Promise me that you will believe that, and that spiritually I shall never be far from you, and that I am growing better instead of worse."

"I don't need to promise." His left hand was still above his eyes. Helena saw his right clench. She went toward the door.

He went forward to open it for her. As he reached out his hand for the knob she struck it down and flung her arms about him.

"I can't go like this," she said passionately. "You must kiss me once more."

He caught her to him. She saw his eyes blaze as he bent his head, and thought, as far as she was capable of thinking, that her generalities had been correct. Even in the rapture of the moment a pang shot through her. Then she found herself on the other side of the door and heard the key turn in the lock.

She remembered only that she was hungry and tired. She went to the larder, and sat on a box and ate a plate of cold chicken and bread, then went to bed and slept soundly.

CHAPTER XVI.

NEXT morning the guests of Casa Norte were assembled in the court, discussing Clive's departure and waiting for the traps which would take them for their accustomed drive, when Helena, dressed in her habit, came out of her room and walked up to them.

"Mr. Clive has gone, I suppose?" she asked.

"He left a short time ago," said Miss Lord. "I am so sorry he will not return. Helena, how can you be so cruel?"

"You are a hypocrite and talking rubbish. I tried to get him away from Mary Gordon, and I lost the game, and I don't care in the least whether you know it or not. I shall not drive with you this morning. I am going for a ride by myself;" and she left the house.

"Home, heaven, and mother!" said Rollins with a gasp. "I didn't think even she would be as game as that. Well, I am sorry —sorry. Damn the whole business of life, anyhow."

Helena rode rapidly through the forest, taking a short cut by trail to the fern grove above the cañon. She came upon it after an hour's hard riding. She noted that it was almost circular in form, irregularly outlined by the redwoods. The stiff and feather tops were rustling in a soft breeze and glinted with the younger shades of green. She thought that she had never seen the sky so blue, the sun so golden. The trees were singing high above. Occasionally, one branch creaked upon another discordantly.

She tethered her horse and went in among the ferns. When they closed above her head, and the green twilight was about her, she felt gratefully that she was beyond the eye of man, hidden even from the redwoods,

which, she had a fancy, were human and wise.

She sat down on the stone and cried. Tears did not come easily to her; she was not a lightly emotional woman. To-day she abandoned herself to a passion of grief which thrilled her nerves and cramped her fingers. It was a passion which accumulated depth and strength instead of dissipating itself, and it was an hour before she was exhausted. The storm brought no relief, as April showers do to most women. She felt heavy and blunt, and knew that the third stage would be the first. She was conscious of one other thing only: that she understood Clive better than she had ever done before, and that her sympathy was as strong for him as for herself.

Suddenly she sprang to her feet and faced the point of the fern-wood where she had made entrance. The tears dried under the rush of blood.

"Owin!" she cried. "Owin!"

She strained her head forward, then drew back slowly. There was not a sound in the forest. Her lips fell apart. "Owin!" she gasped. She shook from head to foot. He had a quick, strong step. She heard it now with a sub-consciousness of which she had never been cognizant before. But it made no sound in her ears.

Then she sank back against the ferns, bending them with her weight, closing her eyes. The spiritual part within her seemed to become clearly defined. Something touched and passed it. There was a moment of promise, rather than of ecstasy, then of peace.

She opened her eyes. "Owin," she whispered. But she was alone.

She went out of the ferns and mounted her horse, and rode rapidly homeward. As she turned the corner of Casa Norte she heard the telephone bell ring violently. A

groom met her and lifted her from the horse. She walked down the garden toward the door. Her aunt entered the office. Helena paused outside of the window to listen to the ridiculous one-sided conversation of the telephone.

"Helloo?

"Speak louder, please.

"A what?

"Oh—how dreadful!

"What? The trestle? Are you sure? How awful! How high is it?

"Three hundred feet! Great heavens! Were any lives lost?

"Everybody? Oh, impossible—but of course—three hundred feet.

"Only a few passengers—well that is something.

"The cars are on fire, you say. Oh, merciful heaven!

"Oh, I am glad. That is one blessing, at least. Of course they were killed instantly on those rocks.

"Who? What? My God! No! No! Why, he was here only this morning. It's impossible! Impossible!

Oh!"

Mrs, Cartright staggered to her feet, her face appearing before the open window. Her jaw was fallen, her skin the color of dough. She saw Helena.

"Oh!" she gasped. "What—what do you think has happened?"

"What?"

"The train went over the trestle by Jo Bagley's—three hundred feet—burned up. And Mr. Clive —isn't it awful that I should have spoken to him not three hours ago?—was on it. Jo Bagley says he spoke to him when the train stopped. Oh, Helena Belmont, how can you look so indifferent!"

Helena turned and went back into the forest.

THE END

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